

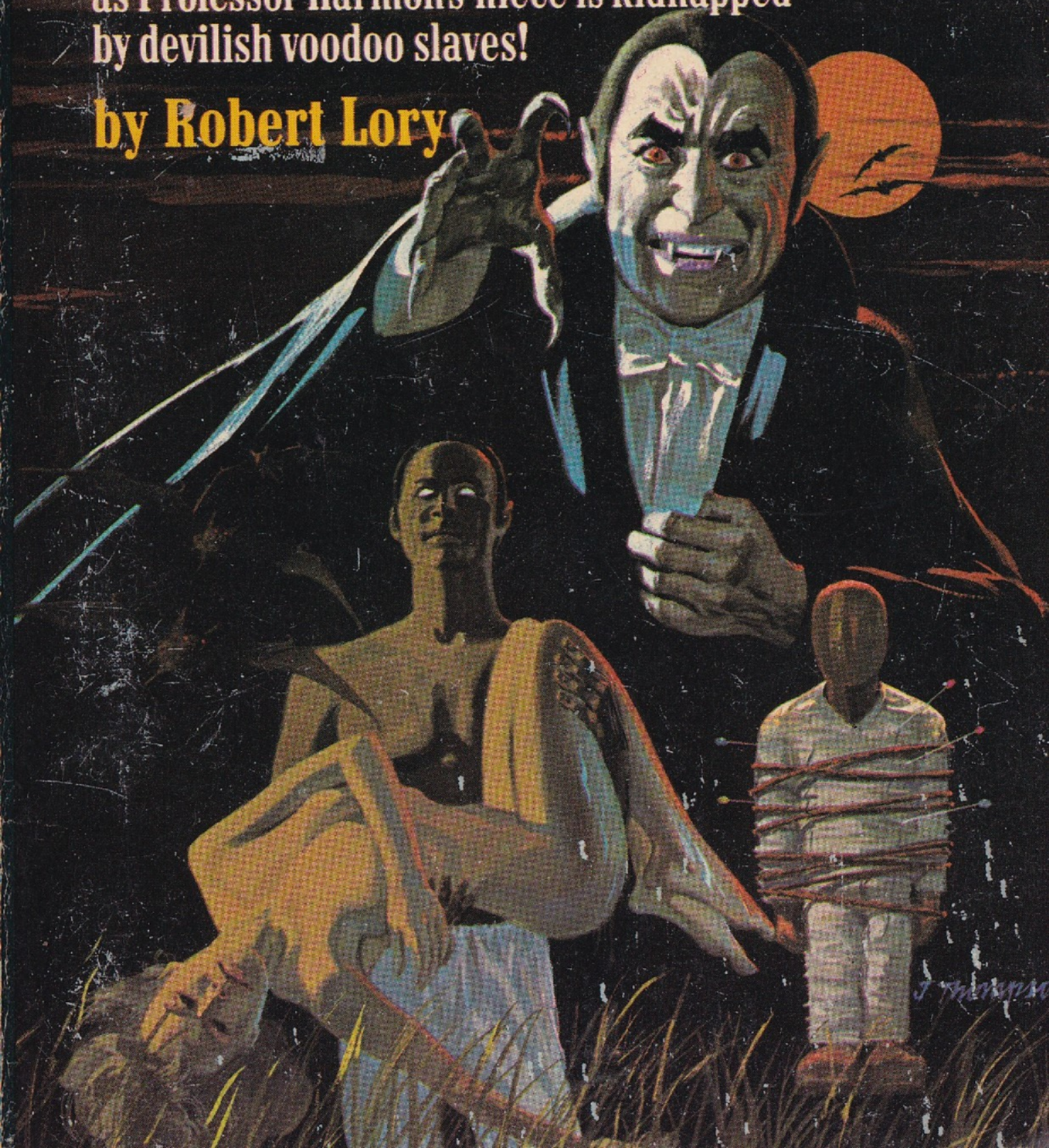
THE DRACULA HORROR SERIES #5

523-00322★95¢

The Drums of Dracula

The throbbing of drums shatters the night
as Professor Harmon's niece is kidnapped
by devilish voodoo slaves!

by Robert Lory



DRUMS . . .

Jenny had heard the drums before, and even though she was used to the sound she shivered—and it wasn't from the temperature of the ocean she was swimming in, either. What *was* it? The particular beat? No . . . she had listened to recordings of voodoo drums and, although feeling their ancient emotional influence that did not lend itself well to articulation, she had not felt this *wrongness*. When she'd heard them during the nights she'd spent on the island they had not affected her this way. And then suddenly she knew what it was.

They were louder than she'd heard them before. Louder and closer. It was almost as if—

As if they were right there—right in the midst of the dark vegetation that lay on the far side of the beach toward which she had been swimming.

But she had to accept the fact that for the moment her unconscious had the upper hand. She would also accept the translation of that terminology: she would accept the fact that, at this moment, she was very scared. *Terrified!*

THE DRACULA SERIES

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- #3 DRACULA'S BROTHERS**
- #4 DRACULA'S GOLD**
- #5 DRUMS OF DRACULA**

DRUMS OF DRACULA

by
Robert Lory

PINNACLE BOOKS • NEW YORK CITY

DRUMS OF DRACULA

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. . . and it is those curious symbols which bring me to the following conversation with a leader of the Yoruba cult:

"We speak not much of the white eater of blood. Not his woman, too," he said.

"White man? And was the woman white as well?"

"Both white. Live among Yoruba 'way back in time. Devil-gods, them both were. The man, he walk only in nighttime, suck blood. Devil-serpent, him. Kill many of tribe. Woman, she fear him. Fear that snake sign, too."

Try as I might, I could elicit nothing further from this old man; nor could I learn anything from others with whom I talked. On most matters, they seemed to see no reason to deny me knowledge, but whenever I brought up the subject of the white demon and his mistress, I received only distant looks and the reply that they did not know of such a one. On one occasion, in asking a native whether he did not wish to speak to me of these things because I was white myself, the unsophisticated man betrayed himself (without, I might add, seeming to notice).

"No, no," he laughed. "You white, but you not white like him!"

*"Some Notes on Voodoo Symbolism
as used in Modern Africa"
G. R. Stadtler,
American Journal of African Ethnology
July, 1948*

CHAPTER 1

The nineteen-year-old girl supposed she had asked for it, but the toothless black woman's response was more than she had bargained for. The bony finger pointed up to the young blonde's face, almost directly between her eyes. The voice of the old woman was venomous.

"You leave well enough alone, missy. You hear? You play at the golf game or at tennis, maybe. You swim or just lay on the beach, like the other white folks do. But I warn you. You tread on the snake, missy, you beware he bite you but bad!"

Jenny Harmon stood stock still, her mouth open in an almost perfect O as the black woman continued to point that withered finger at her and to stare maliciously into her pale blue eyes. She was still standing rigidly upright when the woman turned on her heel and left the kitchen of the main house at Atwood Garth's estate. Then her face flushed red and the blue of her eyes turned darker as she stamped out of the room in search of her host.

She found him in the large library.

Atwood Garth was in his sixties, somewhere

close to the age of Jenny's uncle. The two men had known each other for many years, although they had been out of touch. But Jenny, even though she had never met the Englishman, remembered his name. More important, she remembered that he had a sizable estate on the island of Jamaica. She had not thought twice about writing Atwood Garth with her request. She had not thought twice about doing so without consulting her uncle. Her note had been short and to the point, and so had Garth's cabled response:

HAVE SPOKEN WITH YOUR UNCLE. HE AND I BOTH FEEL YOU FOOLISH TO INTERRUPT COLLEGE STUDIES. NONETHELESS YOU WELCOME AS LONG AS YOU WISH. AFFECTIONATELY, GARTH.

Affectionately. The word described the way the man looked, with none of her Uncle Damien's gaunt ferocity. His build was medium, his gray hair not plentiful. A paunch indicated lack of exercise and a pampered life surrounded by servants. Although he looked like a man of substance, Jenny could not help contrasting him to her uncle, whose wealth was, she thought, far greater. Even though Professor Damien Harmon had been confined to a wheelchair for some thirty-five years or more, he had the lean look of an active man—the taut expression, the sharp eye. Atwood Garth, however, was a soft man—not soft in the sense of flabby, but in the sense of kindness. It was not that her Uncle Damien was *not* kind. He *could* be, on occasion. Once he was satisfied that the person to whom he offered kindness

was *his* kind of person and had done everything possible to extricate himself from whatever problem was now devouring him, Damien would go all-out to help. But his help would be in the style of a Spartan phalanx crashing through all obstructions, rather than an understanding type of assistance.

Understanding. Another word which described Atwood Garth well. As did *kindliness* and *softness* and *twinkling*, the last quality having to do with more than just his eyes, describing the totality of her cherubic yet mature face when warmed up to someone.

As it was doing now, when she entered his presence.

He removed the pipe from his mouth and brushed off the ash which had fallen on his lapel. Placing the book he had been reading on the small French Provincial table beside the immense leather chair which enveloped him, he lifted from the table a third-full brandy snifter.

"Join me? It's excellent," he said.

"No, thank you. It's a little early." It was in fact two in the afternoon.

Atwood Garth nodded. "At your age, it's early. At mine, there is no such thing as early. One does not wish to miss out on anything. But I must say that I'd miss, if I could, your present state of mind. Unless, of course, your flushed look is merely a physical reflection of your having had an untoward encounter with one of our nastier fauna. A spider, perhaps? A snake?"

You beware he bite you bad! the woman had said.

"Mr. Garth. You employ on old woman. Her teeth—well, I mean, she doesn't seem to have any. I don't know her name, but—"

"I do. I know who you mean. You have a complaint about Loala?"

"She—"

"She doesn't like you," he said. "I am well aware of that, child. If I'd known how blonde you were, I would have stopped you before you set foot on this island. Loala has little use for us white-faces, I'm afraid. Many of her people feel the same way. And I must say I can't blame them, given the facts of history."

"It's not just Loala, Mr. Garth. Sometimes I feel as if I'm an object of pure and unadulterated hatred—"

He raised a hand. "Specifics, dear girl. You wish to be some sort of scholar, don't you? Isn't that why you've come to Jamaica—to be a scholar?"

"Well, yes. Sort of."

"Then let us have specifics. Who, specifically, appears to be venting his or her wrath upon you? Eli, my manservant?"

"Oh, no. He's been very nice. I mean, he looks at me strangely sometimes, but I suppose that's to be expected. I was thinking more of that tall black girl. Eu—"

"Ah. Euleila," he said nodding. "I've noticed it myself, as she serves us our meals. Yes, Euleila doesn't much care for you, Jennifer. But tell me, to what do you attribute her dislike?"

"I—I don't know."

"Jennifer. Honestly."

"Well . . . she is, I suppose, rather beautiful."

"And?"

"And, well, I suppose . . ."

"You suppose that her feelings of animosity toward you are a matter of jealousy—one young woman disliking another in terms of attractiveness. Is that what you seem reluctant to say?"

"Yes," Jenny said quietly.

"In that case, you are wrong, Jennifer." Atwood Garth took a long drag on his pipe and met Jenny's eyes square on.

"Wrong," he repeated. "*Dead* wrong."

"Two days ago you came here," he said. She was now sitting in one of the three chairs which, with the huge leather one he sat in, formed a ring around the old Spanish table of polished teak. "Two days. And what have you done in that time?"

"You know what I've done. Nothing—I haven't said anything to offend—"

He raised his glass in a motion which silenced her.

"Ah, but you have. Don't you see? You came here on a mission. You are no island tourist bent on enjoying sun and sand—"

You swim or just lay on the beach, like the other white folks do.

"—nor do you hop on down to Kingston to tour the shops. No, you're quite a different sort of tourist, aren't you?"

"Well, of course I am. I told you in my letter why I wanted to come to Jamaica—why I was willing to give up a semester of school to—"

"To study voodoo," he completed.

"Yes."

"To study voodoo," he said again. "To write a paper which deals with the reality of voodoo. Those were your own words. *The reality of voodoo*. You never fully explained what you meant by that. Would you mind explaining now—just for an old man's edification?"

"I—I don't mind explaining at all. I just didn't think you'd be interested."

"Perhaps I'm not interested, child. But try me, anyway."

"Well, in my anthropology courses, I've read quite a few books on the subject—in fact, I've read just about anything in books and articles I could find on voodoo practices and beliefs. None of them satisfied me. While they told of the rituals and some of the effects of black magic connected with voodoo, there seems to be nothing which adequately explains—adequately to me, I should say—exactly *how* some of the results are achieved."

"And that's what you've come to Jamaica to learn—why a pin in the foot of a doll should cause pain in the foot of a man."

"That's part of it. But, yes, among other things, I'd like to be able to answer that."

"A good many minds before you have tried, my dear."

She paused before answering. "With all due respect, Mr. Garth—*my* mind hasn't. I think that, if I

can witness some of these things firsthand, I may satisfy myself with an explanation."

Garth looked at her and nodded. "You say, Jennifer, that you've read a lot about voodoo. You must know, then, that not everyone is welcome at the rituals."

"I know that. That's why I selected Jamaica. There are other islands where the voodoo is said to be purer than on this one, but here at least there was someone who might be able to help me, to introduce me to someone who might be of assistance—"

"That would be me, I assume."

"Yes, sir, it would. Since you've lived here as long as you have—"

"Since I've lived here as long as I have," he interrupted, "I've learned a few things about the people. I have learned, for instance, that they do not appreciate outsiders prying into their dark habits. You have been my guest for just two days, but my entire household staff is well aware of your purpose here. You cannot expect women like Loala and Euleila to welcome what they consider to be the unwarranted nosiness of a rich white girl regarding something they hold to be their own personal and racial heritage. I once, long ago, asked an old man who worked for me what he got out of the voodoo ritual. Would you be interested in what he told me?"

"Of course I'd be interested."

"He said, 'Mr. Garth, you got all that money, so you a lucky man. I got voodoo, and that what make me lucky.' Those were his exact words. Do

you see why your popularity here is not on a level similar to that which I'm sure your physical appearance and your personality earn you on your college campus?"

Jenny returned Garth's smile. "But I don't mean any harm, honest I don't."

"Don't you?"

"No, of course not."

"I disagree. From their viewpoint you mean them every harm. You admit that you want to write something about their ritual, to explain how it achieves the effects claimed for it. Jamaica is a state which has an eighty-five percent literacy rate—but among the voodooists literacy is not all that high. They are therefore suspicious of the symbols which are, to us, everyday means of communication. But, more than that, you have said you want to *explain* their personal thing. If you do that, and do it well, then they are faced with the possible loss of power which they believe it has. You know, I am sure, that the efficient practitioner of voodoo magic has an immense amount of power."

"Yes. I know that in Haiti—"

"An excellent example. But there are men in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the Caribbean whose power and influence are, while not comparable to that of the late Papa Doc Duvalier, still forces to be reckoned with by the civil administrations who claim to rule over them. It is no different here in Jamaica, although the authorities sometimes go to great pains to deny the fact. In any case, my point is that you are tampering with

something these people feel to be their own—and, regardless of how *you* might feel about it, in their eyes you mean them harm.”

Jenny Harmon stood straight, to her full height.

“You are saying that I should not have come here.”

Atwood Garth shook his head. “The niece of Damien Harmon is more than welcome in my home.” He smiled. “That would go for any niece of Damien’s, but it goes double for one so lovely as yourself.”

“Then you are saying I should abandon my intended research.”

His round face turned serious.

“I would be saying that, in just those words—if I felt it would do any good.” He sighed. “But I know your uncle, and in the short time you have been here, I’ve begun to know you. No, Jennifer, I will not say you should abandon your research. I do not believe in futile communication and, if you share the Harmon trait of stubborn pigheadedness—which I believe you do—such communication would be extremely futile. But I would give you a final warning.”

He paused and drank the last of the brandy in the snifter.

“Jennifer, as you are no doubt aware, a ritualistic symbol which occurs frequently in voodoo is that of the serpent. I urge you not to tread on the serpent.”

“Lest—?” she said.

“Yes. There is more to it. The second half of the old island saying.”

Her voice was steady. "I have heard the second half," she told him.

You beware he bite you but bad!

As the phrase once again jumped into Jenny's mind, she looked involuntarily over her right shoulder—an act of minor disaster, in that her right shoulder was submerged under the moonlit surface of the Caribbean. Breaking her until-then well-executed American crawl for a short spate of coughing, she turned back toward the shoreline.

There was, of course, no one there. She hadn't really expected anyone. It was just that . . .

Well, Atwood Garth certainly hadn't helped this afternoon. But what had she thought he would do—rush out of his chair and fire the old woman and the other girl on the spot? Although, at dinner, he might have—what? Given that tall, sleek Euleila what for? As Jenny now struck out back for shore, she thought about the scene.

It wasn't really a *scene*, although she herself could have created one. The black girl had dumped the fruit salad into Jenny's lap—deliberately! Oh yes, she'd apologized profusely. But the girl's black eyes had belied the apology. Hatred was what they held. Hatred, and a measure of satisfied glee that she'd been able to ruin the "white missy's" dress. Jenny's host, Euleila's boss, surely could have—

What?

He'd warned her. He'd even given her the opportunity to set things right with the house staff.

"Have you been thinking over our conversation

this afternoon?" he'd asked her. "Have you decided to give up this work project which brought you here, and sensibly opt for a relaxed vacation under the sun and by the refreshing sea?"

She could have said that yes, she had decided just those things. She could have—and thereby could have avoided future unpleasantries. Perhaps she might have taken her host's lead, if it had not been for the tall serving girl's steely-eyed stare. That did it. That was what stoked the fires of what Atwood Garth no doubt had meant when he talked of Harmon pigheadedness.

"I'm hardly the vacationing type, Mr. Garth," she had replied. "Not while I can put my mind to use purposefully, anyway. No, I imagine I'll get into the work of my researches tomorrow—bright and early."

The salad had solidified her determination, both in terms of timing and increasing the determination itself. *I will not be intimidated!* Such was the silent message her eyes flashed into those of the mockingly apologetic black girl. *I will not be frightened off by old ladies or blocked by serving girls!*

"I will not," she said to herself now as her arm and legs continued to move rhythmically and propel her toward the shore, and she had to smile. Atwood Garth was right. She *was* like her Uncle Damien, very much like him, it seemed. And she was proud of it.

"It was back in the thirties we first met," Garth had told her during their first night's dinner here. "Horrible circumstances to begin what has turned

into friendship for all these years. We shared a common experience, a medical one. You see this scar on the side of my head?"

She had noticed it. Unlike the rest of his round balding head, the jagged scar did not take well to the Caribbean sun.

"We were separated by thousands of miles, of course, but our doctors conferred constantly. Your uncle got *his* metal plate in his head as a result of courageous police duty. Unfortunately, the power of his legs was lost in the same adventure."

"And you, Mr. Garth? How did you—"

He had laughed. "I'm ashamed to say. No. At my age, a man should be ashamed of nothing. I—er, fell off a horse."

"That's nothing to be ashamed of, is it?"

He had winked at her. "It is when this particular horse was the tamest creature in my cousin's stables—and, I now freely admit, was standing quite still at the time."

A far cry, she had thought from the way her uncle had gotten his metal plate. He had wanted to go into police work. He hadn't needed to at all. With two Ph.D.s and a Master's by his early twenties, and more inherited wealth than he'd ever know how to spend, he nonetheless wanted to devote his life to fighting crime. Not content with the office assigned to the young practitioner of the new science of criminology, Damien Harmon disobeyed orders and went out into field activities, the result of which was a hoodlum's lead pipe smashing his backbone and his skull. The skull had been repaired, a delicate operation. The spine

could not be repaired. Thus, since the year 1938 Damien Harmon had moved not upon legs, but upon wheels. But that had not stopped him. There were stories. . . .

Plenty of stories, most of them envious and spiteful legends created by other members of the family—when there had been other members of the family, which there no longer were. Stories of his brutal fight against crime, a fight he conducted extralegally in his own way, stories which Jenny never could decide whether she should believe or not. Yet, she wanted to. Somehow, she wanted to believe that the hawkfaced man with the white mane of hair and bull-like shoulders did live up to his legends. And somehow she thought there was in reality much substance to them. The people he associated himself with, for example.

She'd known Cam Sanchez for the four years he had been employed by her uncle. He was—well—exciting enough all by himself. But just this past autumn, when she had that trouble in San Francisco, there were those others—that Ktara woman and that Count. Yula. Yes, Count Yula.*

Jenny shivered mentally. Count Yula. A strange man, whose bearing, whose entire presence, unsettled her. She suspected that somehow the man made her uncle and Cam feel uncomfortable too. But he had been of assistance when he was needed, of that there was no doubt, and she was grateful. Why was it she felt so—so *strange* in his presence? There was, to be sure, something about

*See *The Hand of Dracula!*

his eyes, that at times almost seemed red within their centers. And his smile, with those long white teeth. . . .

She shook off the feeling, inhaling deeply and plunging her head under the surface of the water as her arms reached out with combined grace and power to begin a fast rhythm which would propel her swiftly to the sandy beach. Picking up speed, her mind mentally counted the beats of her execution. And then, suddenly, she stopped, her head lifting above the water. Something was wrong.

The rhythm was what was wrong.

The response to her furious stroking of the water had been exhilarating, the thrusting forward of her body to its maximum granting her a feeling of dignity as well as accomplishment. The hearing of her own pulse as it quickened in her temples gave her the sense of being, for the moment, pure animal, an organic machine which functioned on a primitive level, someone or something who-which had no concerns of intellect. Such an elemental substance was this blood which pounded within her, and yet . . .

It was not pounding as she had expected.

For a brief moment, she thought that there was something wrong with her. Had she extended herself too much? Had she pushed herself beyond the limit of her capabilities? She didn't think so, but—

No. The wrongness, the rhythmic irregularity, was not within herself. It was external. And as the pulse-beat of her own blood slacked, she knew

that the rhythm she had confused with her own was coming from the land.

Drums.

Even though she had heard the drums before, and even though her body had had more than enough chance to accommodate itself to the water temperature, she shuddered. What was it? The particular beat? No. She had listened to recordings of voodoo drums and, although feeling their ancient influence which was an emotional something which did not lend itself well to translation into rational statements, she had not felt this—this *wrongness*. She had also heard them during the nights she'd spent on the island and, again feeling the old responses as before, they had not affected her this way. And then suddenly she knew what it was.

They were louder than she'd heard them before. Louder and closer. It was almost as if—

As if they were right there—right in the midst of the dark vegetation which lay on the far side of the beach toward which she had been swimming. Foolish, of course. She knew enough psychology to be aware that the unconscious can make the conscious mind imagine all sorts of things. After all, wasn't that the basis of her entire theory of voodoo and its claims? Very much akin to faith healing. You tell someone with enough authority that he will be cured—and, lo! he is cured. Conversely, you tell someone with enough authority that he is going to die—and precisely *how* he is going to die—and he obliges. All because of the

authoritativeness of the telling—and because of the faith of the listener. If he *believes* . . .

But what did *she* believe?

Her Uncle Damien had an extensive library, almost half of it devoted to matters which modern thinkers classify as being *occult*. Once, when she asked him why he bothered with such subjects, he gave her a long and thoughtful look. “To question such things is intelligent, Jennifer,” he had said. “But to dismiss them outright is the height of stupidity.”

Well, she was not dismissing them outright! Certainly she was not blinding herself to other explanations—including the one which most thinkers refused to consider: that it worked because it *really* worked, that what appeared to be happening actually was happening, that the words of the voodoo practitioner could be taken at face value. Uncle Damien was absolutely correct. To dismiss the surface explanation outright might be to make the mistake of seeking complicated explanations where there weren’t any.

So she would accept the fact that for the moment her unconscious had the upper hand. She would also accept the translation of that terminology. She would accept the fact that, at this moment, she was scared. Frightened.

Of course, she would also console herself with the knowledge that there was no rational reason for her to be scared. It was all in her mind.

Except that the drums weren’t, were they?

No. They existed. Her sense of hearing—a sense independent of the unconscious—told her so.

(But even that was an interesting question. Was the sense of hearing—or, for that matter, any of the senses—independent of the signals sent to the brain from that vast mire of blackness which psychologists label “the unconscious”? Interesting question. Perhaps, when she had time, she would look into it. There were obvious experiments which could be conducted in controlled situations which could prove, one way or the other—)

The drums. They *were* close!

It wasn't her imagination. They were very close. Not actually on the other side of the sand, no, but close. If she could sneak up on them—

Foolish again—*very* foolish! Here she was in a bathing suit, a skimpy one at that, thinking that she was prepared to go stalking off in the middle of the night. No. No and no and *no*! And even if she were fully dressed, she knew that she didn't quite have the guts to go wandering off in search of drums when she hadn't been invited. She might not be afraid of the stories of voodoo, but Atwood Garth was right when he had told her about the proprietary views the islanders held regarding their rituals. She had read enough on the subject to know of the flashing knives which had suddenly appeared near the throats of those who sought to learn the substances of the rites unbidden. So no, she would not attempt to do anything foolish.

Or would she?

The possibility occurred to her while she still was treading water where she'd surfaced. Maybe . . . But first, of course, she'd have to swim to the

bathhouse and change. Yes. After that, she could make her final decision, which, as she flattened out to stroke her way to the shore, she knew would involve a tug-of-war between the effect of those drums and the ingrained pigheadedness of the Harmons.

Silently she swam, allowing the touches of her toes to tell her when it was time to bring her soles noiselessly beneath her for support. Without a drop of water from her body splashing down to disturb the calmness of the night which surrounded the beat of the drums, she straightened upward and slowly emerged from the water onto the sand.

The so-called "silent swim" was a game she often liked to play, but like many games it had its origin in serious business. The technique had been taught to her by an ex-navy frogman who, although the place of teaching was a swimming pool in San Francisco, had learned it himself as a necessary element in keeping himself alive in his role of planting explosives under the hulls of enemy vessels. Jenny's rational mind told her that the only reason for using the technique now was to gratify her sense of intrigue. There was no *real* reason for her to be silent, but the game aspect of it all was a welcome heightening of the experience—a play-acting that she was in some sort of danger.

Bosh! She didn't for a moment believe that she was in danger. Nonetheless, the thought that she *might be* gave her system a pleasurable feeling.

No doubt it had something to do with the adrenal glands.

She laughed silently. Such self-analysis, Jennifer. Such in-depth introspection! Have you ever considered psychoanalysis as a profession? Perhaps you should seriously consider that—after spending a little time on the couch yourself, that is!

Brightly now, responding to the humor in the situation, she stepped across the sand to the bathhouse. The structure was illuminated by the moon, except for one action in the shadow of a large clump of trees. Jenny hardly noticed when a smaller shadow detached itself from the larger expanse of blackness. She did notice, however, when the moonlight highlighted the figure of the old housekeeper whose absence of teeth was apparent behind the plump lips now extended in a frenzied grin.

"There!" Loala cried triumphantly. A gnarled finger pointed toward Jenny. *"There she be! We get her now, hey!"*

Jenny's half-smile was gone instantly—in the same instant that three other black forms detached themselves from the shadows and soundlessly followed the crooked finger of the housekeeper.

Directly toward Jenny.

CHAPTER 2

"We goin' get you, missy!"

Maybe, Jenny thought to herself—but you're going to have to move fast to do it!

Turning on her heel, her graceful legs propelled her back the way she had come, running swiftly almost to the water's edge, then turning a sharp left toward the main house. If she couldn't outrun them, at least she could get close enough to scream for help. But she had run no more than ten yards when she saw that her plans were going to have to change.

Some twenty yards ahead, two dark figures sprang from the foliage to the sand. They did not immediately run toward her, and when they did make a move it wasn't a run. It was more of a walk, an ungraceful, limping walk.

Turning again, Jenny saw that she was facing three more shadowy figures in the opposite direction. She was trapped.

And the drums. They seemed to be getting louder.

From somewhere in the distance, a woman laughed. Jenny shuddered at the mental picture of the old housekeeper whose open mouth, she

was sure, was unloosing the macabre cackle on the night.

She turned toward the water and considered her chances. No. Her muscles were already tired from their workout. There was only one chance, and she took it. Whipping around suddenly, she crossed the short distance and headed straight into the tangle of vines and leaves she found there. Thick as it was, she had clawed her way through the slowing restraints before the five on the beach had reached the spot she'd entered. Once free of encumbrances, she again began running, passing wide to the right of the beach house and up the incline which led first to the three small guest cottages and, beyond them and around to the right, to the main house. It was all uphill, yes, but she had a good chance of making it, especially if her pursuers were no swifter than they'd shown themselves to be on the beach.

Good chance? What was she thinking? She *had* to make it—and therefore she *would* make it.

The bottoms of her feet were bleeding, she knew, from the rough ground they were traversing. As her arms and legs swung out swiftly she could see in her peripheral vision that they were a mass of small cuts and scratches. But they didn't matter. They could be treated with simple medication at the house. The real danger would be what might happen if she *didn't* make it to the house.

Negative thinking. Move, girl!

She moved, her panting breath recharging itself from within. She was nearing the first of the cot-

tages now. Thank heaven that the moon still shone down in full light. She could see clearly behind her and to the front. Behind her, there was nothing, no one. Ahead, the same. She had it made! But someone could be lurking in the shadows of the cottage, yes? *Could*, yes. Could be waiting for her to get closer, to run right into the trap. Which might explain why no one was bothering to chase her. A flushing move—that's what the whole thing might have been.

Good girl, she told herself. All right—around the cottages in a wide swing, then. She smiled to herself as her feet began to execute her plan. The smile had reached but half of its intended span when it froze.

Something—something she didn't see coming because it wasn't there!—slammed into her right shin and dropped her to the ground so swiftly that, had her arm reflexes not been as fast as they were, her head would have met the earth with full impact. Her forearms aching and burning from skinned elbows to what might have been at least one sprained wrist, she swiftly looked about her.

Nothing. No one. Just—from somewhere, everywhere—the drums. And, from behind her, down by the beachhouse, the old crone's cackle, rising above the drumbeat as if she were singing to an accompaniment. But if there was nothing here—

In the light of the moon, Jenny could see the welt beginning to rise on her shin. It looked as though—she had run into a taut rope or wire which had been raised before her path. It had felt

that way, too! But the rope was not there! Nothing was!

She jumped to her feet. All right, so something had happened she couldn't explain. The situation demanded not explanations, but action. She resumed her running, although some small part of her brain, some small section of her mind, fully expected that as each second passed she would be brought down a second time.

And it was right.

This time, somehow, her body was ready for it. She took the fall with much more grace, even though her shin—the left one this time—was still stinging as she went down and, with as close to a fluid motion as humanly possible, was pushing up again and continuing her run. This time she didn't look about to see what it was that had dropped her. She knew there wouldn't be anything to see.

No, that's impossible! Anything which can cause a physical reaction like that simply has to be physical itself. A thin wire, perhaps—that could be it. No dice. A wire too thin for the moonlight to pick up would not leave a bruise along her skin—it would slice through flesh and bone alike. Then there just was no explanation at all!

No? How about your own explanation of voodoo? That theory holds that a physical reaction can take place without a physical cause, doesn't it?

Yes, but there's no time for theories now. This isn't any intellectual discussion in any booklined study. This is for real—and it's frightening!

Frightening?

Damned right it's frightening, and if you weren't a—a—pigheaded Harmon, you'd *be* frightened!

She was running still, the lights of the large house visible just over the next rise. Five minutes, that's all she'd need to—

It was as if something hard and heavy had crashed into her back, right between the shoulder blades.

For the third time she went down, this time, fortunately, her abrupt landing was upon a thick floor of grass.

Where? What?

Nothing. *Nothing!*

And no one within sight. No one in any direction at all.

All right. Somehow, they were downing her. Somehow, obviously, they had figured she would run the way she had. Toward the main house. But the best laid plans of mice and men and Jamaicans . . .

Rising stiffly, she cut across toward the cottages. The closest was the middle one now, and if there had been someone waiting inside the first—or outside it, for that matter—she could maybe slip by without him seeing her. Yes, the middle cottage.

The drums in her ears—the old woman had stopped her screech-laughing now—Jenny mentally counted as she moved as fast as she could toward the guest cottage. Her every sense was alert, her eyes glued to the dark shadows surrounding

the little house. If anything moved—God! don't let anything move!

Nothing moved. How much time it took for her to reach what she considered to be the safety of the dark shadow nearest to her, she could not say. She'd lost count, repeating *eight-nine-ten* over and over. But she was there.

She listened, her breath held somewhere between an urgent inhale and an equally urgent exhale. Nothing. No sound—other than those infernal drums and the rhythmic beat of her own pulse which now, no longer imaginary, was pounding loudly above her temples. And then there was another sound. Down by the water. That high-pitched cackle. And now there was also something her eyes could detect from her dark shadowy enclosure. The moonlight showed them clearly.

Three—no, four figures. Moving unhurriedly up the incline.

She felt the touch of coldness along her spine, and then another, the second chill a result of a second something else she now saw. Something much closer than those others—something moving directly in front of her, inches from her face.

A thick, long-fingered, black hand.

There was no panic, just adrenaline and reflex action. Where there was a hand, there had to be a forearm, and the edges of two suddenly formed feminine handblades lashed out and connected with power marshaled from deep within the girl's center. Instantaneously, she pivoted to face her intended assailant, her right foot driving upward

into the blackness—directly where she expected a face to be.

The thudding sole of her bare foot told her it was, even though the dark shadows did not give her visual confirmation. Snapping her leg downward again, she heard an animal kind of grunt as the hand again came toward her. That she could see, since it extended out into the area where moonlight was in command.

Those karate classes she'd taken to reach green belt status had come in handy, but she also remembered the wisdom imparted by her instructor:

“When really attacked—on the street where the stakes are serious—the first rule is to try to escape. If you can't, lash out with all you've got. Then, if you've got the chance, *run like hell!*”

Jenny stood her ground, trying to decide. If she could show these people now, right now, that she wasn't going to put up with their threats, that she could fight back and fight back effectively, damagingly—

But that hand—and the other that now had materialized parallel to it . . . Both were held palms down, fingers spread wide, and in the moonlight—light which created such a sharp contrast with the blackness behind it—they looked as if they were independent things, unrelated to any other bodily parts. But no, that wasn't quite true, because there were wrists, as she could now see, and forearms. But it was, yes—it was as if the parts of the arms themselves were materializing out of nothing. Or—

She swallowed hard.

It was as if these hands and arms were rising up out of some freshly dug grave!

Her legs made the decision before her mind had the chance. She bolted from the spot, swiftly moving around to the back of the cottage. She stopped and listened. There were no sounds of her being followed—wait! Yes, they were there now. Slow, shuffling sounds.

Her mind began to calculate. She could not move around to the side of the cabin. If she did, the others who were coming from below might spot her. As to the third cottage, the one behind her, she was certain to be seen by the shuffling man she'd just encountered. Besides, there might well be someone there. If there was, and he was looking this way . . .

No, that would be all right. As she rounded the corner, she had been in shadow herself, the shadow cast by two tall trees and which went completely up the wall to the cabin to the roof.

Her hands groped and found a lattice-work trellis running up the exterior of the cottage. They hesitated for only a moment, during which she wondered if she was doing something stupid. Then they reached high and her arms lifted the rest of her upward. The shuffling man was getting closer to the corner now. If the trellis wasn't fastened strongly enough to the wall . . .

But it was, and within moments her easy climb had ended.

She lay silently on the thatched roof. Then, with as little sound as possible, she moved for-

ward, up the gentle slope to the peak as far as she could—as far as, but no farther than, the line which separated shadow from the cold moonlight.

Cold.

It *was* cold. Was it because she herself was chilled, deep inside as well as where the dampness of her bathing suit was causing goose-bumps on her skin? Or was it the inside cold which was causing them? In any case, the same moonlight, which earlier she had thought of as bathing the landscape in a joyous silver, was now anything but joyous in its effect. But she knew that it was not the light of the moon or the suddenly sinister-looking landscape which had changed. It was, as the old proverb said, the eyes which beheld them—and the clearly visible figures which, to the still beating drums, came toward the cottage—came, on a direct line, toward her cottage!

Six figures now. One of them, the old woman, moved faster than the others, which were taller and more . . . more massive. As they came closer, she began to hear the old woman talking to them. It was an urging, commanding voice—something *between* urging and commanding—which was incessant, relentless, now and then punctuated with a short, high-pitched laugh. Listening, her eyes fastened upon the group as it made its way ever closer, Jenny was able to distinguish individual words, but could not understand them. It was, obviously, another language the old woman was speaking.

Closer and closer they came now, the woman passing by the first cottage without even a glance,

the men behind her not seeming to look at anything at all. In the full light of the moon above, she could see them clearly now—the old housekeeper, puffing and panting, and waving a small white something in her right hand, her eyes seeming to pierce the very shadow in which Jenny lay silent as death. And the five men behind the old Loala—shuffling in her train, as if walking itself took a mighty effort, heads and shoulders bent over so that she could see no faces at all, just the close-shaven backs of heads and necks and huge rounded shoulders. Moving, moving, closer and closer.

And then, directly in front of the cottage, stopping.

The old woman shouted something in her high screech.

And the drums stopped.

There was deathly quiet.

For the space of three of Jenny's heartbeats. Then, very softly, the old woman chuckled to herself. Or was it just to herself? Jenny thought not. Not when she heard the whispered, scarcely audible voice of the housekeeper.

"You hide good, missy. But not good enough."

"You think you fool old Loala?"

It was a loud challenge the old woman issued. It was followed by a laugh. "I know where you is, missy, don't you fool yourself about that. I know sure well where you is. But I think it would be right for you to tell me yourself. What you think?"

Oh, you not talking, right? You keeping real quiet, just like you fooling somebody.”

Another laugh. “All right, missy, you play real dead. But I guess old Loala know the way to make you speak up. I guess that I surely do. *Hee!*”

Daring hardly to breathe, Jenny watched with wide eyes as the old woman raised above her head the small white thing she was carrying. She recognized it for what it was at the very moment the old black lips told her.

“This doll, missy, has got some of your hair, some of your eating juices, and some of your soul in it. When you was running just earlier, you fell down a couple times—right? You know why? Because, missy—because even though I couldn’t see just where you were at, all I had to do to make you fall down was to take my little finger—the littlest finger I got—and hit this doll’s leg. Right here!”

Jenny couldn’t see precisely what the black woman’s finger did to the doll. Nonetheless, she felt the pain shoot across her right shinbone.

“Hah, missy! You feel that, didn’t you?”

Felt it, yes. But no sound, even though the strike had caused her tear-ducts to send forth their fluids. No—she could not yell, could not speak to protest. Maybe the old woman was just testing. Maybe—but the doll worked. The magic in the doll, if it was magic—that worked. No maybe about that.

“Missy, you don’t speak to this here old woman. I don’t take no insult to that, I really don’t. Even though I been talking to you, and you don’t talk

to me back. I know why it is you don't talk. You scared, simple as that. You scared. And you got every right on earth to be plenty scared, I tell you. 'Cause now, you going to tell us right where you are. Even though I know just well where you are, you going to tell us. Right now."

With tear-blurred eyes, Jenny could see the old woman do something with the midsection of the little white doll. Instantly Jenny doubled up with a sharp pain in her stomach, the sound of her own scream ringing in her ears.

Loala's laugh followed. "You see, missy? Now that you know you got no chance to hide, you know you got no chance to get away. Is that right? I sure hope that's right, 'cause I'm sending some of my friends up for you. Now, you be nice to them, you hear old Loala? You be real nice, missy, and they won't mess you up none—I promise you that."

Promise? Wincing still from the pain in her midsection, Jenny pulled back deeper into the shadows. All right. Maybe she would be taken, but it wouldn't be without a fight—a fight which even now she was trying to convince herself that she had a chance of winning. How many of them were there? What difference did it make? Anybody trying to climb up on this roof would be almost helpless against a well-aimed and well-executed foot-thrust to the face. Five of them? Six? If they were the odds, that was that. But, by the blood which ran hot through her veins, she wasn't going to give in until—

Stubborn pigheadedness. She could almost hear Atwood Garth's words.

True, Mr. Garth. That's us Harmons. She rose up to a low crouch, ready for the first move, ready for anything.

For anything except what she saw.

The hands groping at the roof edges she expected. That there was more than one pair of them she also expected. There were four, and she had been ready for five or six. But it was when the faces rose up into sight that she received the shock of her life—and the cold chill of stark terror.

She tried to scream but couldn't. Nor would her limbs respond to her brain signals; then even the signals stopped as her mind numbed. It was too much, an overload on credibility. She dropped to the rooftop in a faint, but not before what she saw was indelibly imprinted upon her mind.

The faces. Hangdog looking, as if they had no will or movement of their own. But that was not what slammed into Jenny Harmon's mind with such impact. No. It was the eyes of the four men.

All of them. Their eyes were wide open, the moonlight casting down perfectly reflecting light. Wide eyes, pure white. No black centers surrounded by brown or gray tints. No pupils, no corneas.

Pure milky white eyes. Staring into hers, and into oblivion.

CHAPTER 3

It was close enough to four-thirty in the morning for Cameron Sanchez to be righteously angry at the telephone's ring. His bedroom on the third floor of the Westhampton, Long Island manor was in complete darkness. The pines surrounding the great thirty-five-room house were quieter than normal, as was the surf which usually pounded his head to a throbbing version of an old Puerto Rican lullaby as might be played by the latest shooting-star band to make it to the top of the hard rock music charts this week or next.

The point was that tonight it had been relatively easy for Cam Sanchez to fall asleep and to stay that way. The further point was that the damned telephone was ringing.

Rolling over onto his back, he used a muscular right leg to kick off the covers from his naked body. It was a body to be admired, six foot five inches and two hundred and twenty pounds of steellike muscle, and indeed it had been an object of admiration many times during at least the second half of its thirty-odd years.

The body of the giant moved into a sit-up kind of position, legs quickly swinging down over the side of the bed, feet firmly meeting the cold, pol-

ished hardwood floor. A finger depressed the button over the clock-light unit, and light blazed into the room.

The thick eyebrows furrowed as the dark brown eyes closed. Roughly chiseled features winced as the light seemed to slam off the completely hairless bullet head which capped this visage—a devil-like visage which would have commanded awe in lesser men even when smiling.

It was not smiling.

The phone was not going to stop ringing. Less than a dozen people had this particular number, and they were all the type who *would* call at such an ungodly hour, and who would stay on the pipe until someone picked up the receiver.

His employer, Damien Harmon, detested the telephone—had, in fact, installed the present unit plus a few complex attachments only because he felt it necessary to have flexibility in communications mechanisms. But Damien Harmon, at forty-three in the morning, was not about to answer the ringing of the thing. Not only might it be a wrong number, but there was the practical side of the matter. Harmon couldn't get up from his bed and into his wheelchair all that easily—especially for the telephone. Cam Sanchez, his employee of just over four years, was young enough and spry enough to merit that task. Which is why there was an extension just outside his door on the third floor.

“Third floor, fine,” Cam had said a few months back after the special remodeling had been com-

pleted. "But why *outside* the door? Why not right next to my bed?"

The sly professor had responded with mock seriousness which in truth was not mock at all. "Cameron, my boy, when that telephone rings, I want you on your feet."

He was on his feet now—and angry.

"Yes," he said into the lifted instrument.

"Damien?" a man's voice asked.

"No. This is Cam Sanchez."

There was a pause. "I—I was told this number would connect me with Professor Damien Harmon."

"It can—if you get through Cam Sanchez," was the terse reply.

"Oh, I see. You're his man."

"I'm *my* man, friend. I work for Professor Harmon."

Another pause. "I see. I mean, there was no offense intended."

"And none taken. Unless this call at this hour of the morning isn't important. I don't like being pulled out of my bed at four-thirty."

"I assure you—"

"Fine. Assure me. Kindly tell me who you are and why you're calling now."

"My name is Atwood Garth. I must speak to Damien. Please. I know it's late but, believe me, he wouldn't forgive me if I didn't call him immediately upon knowing . . ."

"Knowing what, Mr. Garth?"

Before the voice on the other end of the line could respond, the answer came from behind him.

The woman had black hair and was dressed in a black turtleneck blouse and slacks. Her face was white as ivory and her eyes—oriental in a way, but shaped more like a cat's—were pale green in their centers. Her name was Ktara.

Cam Sanchez frowned at the woman's completely ignoring his nudity, frowned because this had to be one of the most beautiful women ever to walk the earth. But her sharp ears obviously had caught the name he'd repeated, the name of the caller.

"Garth," she said. "I'll awaken Professor Harmon. Mr. Atwood Garth would not call at this hour unless something had happened to Jennifer. Something bad."

"Continue, Atwood."

Damien Harmon sat like an ancient Norse god in his wheelchair, his thin, sharp-lined face looking in the dimly lit corridor like that of Loki, the evil trickster, his bull-like shoulders recalling the strength of Thor, the thunderer, and his steel-set tone bringing to mind the gravity of Odin himself, lord of all the gods.

"Go ahead, Atwood."

"Originally, I think their intentions were different. I think what they intended to do was scare her off her researches, maybe to make her leave the island. But finding out who she was probably was enough to have changed their minds to add this twist."

"One moment, Atwood," Harmon said. He placed the telephone in the call-box unit which

Cam had devised for each of the telephones in the great house. When the proper button was pressed, Cam and Ktara also could hear the caller's words. He wanted them to. "You are talking about the money, I assume."

"Yes."

"Read the note to me and describe it, please."

"It just says: *Garth, we got your girl guest. You get together five hundred thousand dollars by three days. We tell you where to deliver it when that time here. You do as we say. Else she die from her own screamin'.* That's all there is, Damien. The note is hand-written, crudely printed actually, and there is a mark at the bottom of it. A crude drawing of a snake formed by sharp, almost square angles."

Harmon looked at Ktara. She nodded. "It is a voodoo sign."

"I beg your pardon?" Atwood Garth's voice said.

"Nothing," Harmon replied. "What have you done about this—other than to call me?"

"I've done nothing, Damien. I could call in the police, but before I did so I wanted you to—"

"No police."

Garth's voice was sober. "I'm relieved. I was afraid you might . . . well, the stakes being what they are, I see little alternative to paying their demand. Jamaica is not that large a place, Damien, but it is large enough for a voodoo witchman to keep himself and a prisoner behind the wall of native silence for a long time. Police inquiries would

tip him off long before a single clue as to Jennifer's whereabouts were scented."

He paused. "I . . . I'm terribly sorry about this, Damien. I wish I had the funds myself, but—well, five hundred thousand dollars . . ."

"The money is no problem to me," Harmon said.

"I shall instruct my banker as you direct, Damien. As soon as business hours are here."

"No, don't do that."

"Damien?"

"Don't speak to your banker."

"But—but what is it you wish me to do?"

"Nothing. Do nothing at all—except to prepare your house for additional guests. There will be three of us."

"Three," Ktara repeated. The telephone had been replaced on its receiver. Both she and Cam had been waiting for the professor to speak first to explain the number. She knew, from Cam's mind, that he wondered which of the four persons dwelling in this house was to be left behind. Harmon's mind was closed to her powers of reading. There were few things she could not do, this woman whose birth was an event buried in thousands of years of human history, but even she had her limitations, one of which was her inability to mentally penetrate iron and steel. In the tenuous relationship which existed between her and Harmon, the professor and Cam had sometimes regarded this fact as an advantage to themselves. But it sometimes proved awkward, like now, when the man

in the wheelchair probably wanted nothing more than to be left alone for a moment with his own thoughts and not questioned regarding them.

"You said three," she prodded.

Harmon's scowl widened. His eyes shot to Cam's. "A plane. Arrange for it to leave as soon as possible. I suggest you also put some clothes on. The climate in Jamaica this time of year is quite excellent, but there will be the somewhat cold ride to the airport."

When Cam had left the hallway, he looked at Ktara.

"They have taken Jennifer. They have *dared* to take Jennifer." There was no mistaking the rage in his eyes. Then his voice turned as cold as death itself.

"Three, Ktara. Three by day, and a fourth by night. I wish to go below now. I will speak to your Master."

The basement laboratory, connected with all three aboveground floors by elevator, had been painted white throughout and lighted by ceiling fixtures which should have been more than adequate to counter the darkness of the large room, the walls of which were lined with workbenches and shelves of electronic and chemical equipment. But the darkness was there—that and a strange dampness which permeated the air and which could not be dispelled by any modern climate-control device. The reason for the atmosphere might be the proximity to the water, but those who knew what the room currently con-

tained had a different explanation. The darkness, the all-pervasive dankness—the *unholiness* about the place—centered on the large crate stationed in the center of the stone floor.

The crate was open now. Within its white satin-lined sides and bottom there was nothing—except a quantity of unusually dark earth. Until moments ago there had been something else there, but the man in the wheelchair had concentrated briefly and, within himself, a mental finger moved a lever which was part of a small unit implanted beneath his ribcage. That lever in turn interrupted an energy flow which was in sympathy with a second unit implanted near the heart of a second individual. A small wooden splinter was withdrawn from the heart into the shell of the unit, and this allowed the owner of the heart to function normally. But *normally* perhaps wasn't the correct term to use with regard to this particular individual.

Count Dracula stood by the coffin's side, his black evening clothes immaculately tailored to his gigantic frame. His thick black eyebrows were arched, his thin lips slightly curled as if he were enjoying some private joke. Even as commanding as this visage of noble aristocracy might be, there was a second visage the Count could take on at will, one whose transformation brought the present sleek black hair down the high-arched forehead while the nostrils flattened and lips drew back from teeth which were no longer simply teeth, but the fangs of a deadly animal. The eyes which were now black as deep pits then would

flash as blood-red suns with burning white centers, and the strength of his body—which in less terrible form was more powerful than that of the stalwart Sanchez—became ten times more powerful, a similar transformation taking place in the nobleman's mental powers.

"You are overwrought, Harmon," he said, his voice one which was thick and strangely accented. He knew why, of course, the information coming to him in projections from the mind of the woman. He had no mind-reading powers of his own, but he didn't need them. Not while he had Ktara. And he had Ktara from his beginnings; such were the strange bonds which held them together that neither could be entirely free of the other. But there were no doubts as to who was master and who was the slave.

The Count still appeared amused. "You fear for the life of the young Jennifer, and in so doing you demonstrate the pettiness of the human mind. You fail to accept the fact that all humans must die, yourself included. What should it matter that death comes earlier than, by your logic, it should? Is it not almost always the case? Except for the very aged and tired, do any of you humans regard the arrival of death as anything but far too early?"

"I do not wish to philosophize," Harmon said tensely.

"Ah! And I rather thought that was one of your strong points, Professor."

"I wish you to kill for me."

The Count laughed. "Is that different from anything you have asked me to do in the past?"

"It is different."

"*You* say it is different. *I* say it is not. From the very beginning, it has been so. Vengeance was your reason for loosing me against that group of criminals on this very island.* It was to assist your niece that I was unleashed against those false devil-worshipers and that demented burier of the dead on the far side of your country.** As far as the batmasters,*** that was a matter of—"

"That," Harmon said quietly, "was a matter of your vengeance—vengeance upon those who would dare to tamper with the minds of those you look upon with feelings of kinship. And before you go on, it was *your* vengeance which played the greater part in our return to Arefu and the deaths of those who wished to steal your wealth."*

"The greater part?" the Count laughed again. "I dispute that, Harmon, but let it be. You might recall, however, that I can do little on my own—little without your agreement. And that, in the case of my war against the tampered-with bats, you required my services under the terms of my lost wager.** As for my gold, you became as eager as I when you understood just *how much* gold was involved and what it might do to your world if allowed to fall into the hands of—"

**Dracula Returns!*, *The Hand of Dracula!*, *Dracula's Brothers*, *Dracula's Gold*.

***The Hand of Dracula!*

"Enough!" Harmon said through his teeth. "You will do as I say in this matter—again because I require it under the terms of our agreement."

Count Dracula looked at Ktara, then back down at the professor.

"You are aware, Harmon, that there are but two of your calendar months remaining to that pledge."

"I am well aware of that, Count. But for that time which remains you will do as you have said. You are, you have said, a man of your word."

The Count smiled. "What are two months to one of my time span? You are too intelligent to doubt that I shall win in the end, that your end will come with my teeth buried deeply in your throat and your life's blood filling my thirst. The end, when it comes—"

"When it comes, it will come," Harmon said. "For now, you will do as I command."

"Request," the Count corrected.

"Command," the professor repeated, his eyes directly meeting those of Dracula. "Bargain or no bargain, you cannot afford to kill me now, Count. When I die, that implant within me closes—forever. You know what that means."

"Yes, Harmon, I know what that means. But do not use the word *forever* lightly. *You* have no idea what *that* means."

The professor's face had reddened with the rage which had been boiling within him. Suddenly his eyes turned from the Count's, his features locking into hard sculptured forms, his face becoming as pale as the bone-white walls which

surrounded him. He seemed now oblivious to the two who stood in the room with him as his eyes stared off vacantly. When he spoke, the ice-death of his words were not lost upon either Ktara or the Count.

“They have taken Jennifer,” he said. “In doing so, they have brought upon their souls the revenge of Hell itself. I swear that by my very blood!”

“An appropriate oath,” Count Dracula said. For a brief moment, his black eyes flickered red.

CHAPTER 4

As their chartered jet dipped down in preparation for landing at Ocho Rios, Cam Sanchez closed the book he had been reading and deposited it next to the four others he had sampled during the past three and a half hours.

Voodoo. That was the subject of each of the books he had collected from the professor's bookshelves. He'd brought the books for two reasons, the first of which had to do with taking his mind off the fact that he was flying. Cameron Sanchez was scared to death of being that high off the surface of his world. In the larger planes, he nor-

mally balanced his fears by smoking a long cheroot, three of which he now carried in his jacket pocket. He was a smoker only in that kind of spot, when he could tell himself that he'd rather go out by lung cancer than the way it looked as though he'd be going. Prior to his recent adventures, the cigars had been confined to airplane seats, but in recent months he'd found himself in other situations which the long cigars helped his nerves to handle.

But here and now, although his lungs told him they yearned for some of that foul-tasting smoke, he knew it was not the place or the time. In the small quarters of the charter his lighting up would have brought strong disapproval from both Ktara and the professor. As for Ktara, she could go to hell for all Cam cared. No, that wasn't quite true. That was an attitude he knew he had consciously built up within himself. It was defensive in nature, he also knew. There was no reason for him to think she felt anything toward him except disdain. He was, after all, even with his physical attributes, nothing more than an ordinary human being—a *puny* human being, as her Master had said many times. In her eyes, he was—

What? He wasn't sure. He knew she admired the professor's mind, which was why she had chosen him to be the one to revive her Master from his deathlike condition. And yet she must have known that Harmon could not have accomplished the deed by himself, that he would need the leg muscles of Cam Sanchez.

Maybe that's all he was. A pair of legs for a

mind which could not ambulate by itself. No, hands too. One could not forget—he could not forget—that it had been his hands which, in that crypt under that mountain, had yanked the blooded stake from the heart of the vampire. Vampire? *“Your continued use of the word vampire is not entirely accurate,”* the Count had told them long ago. No, not long ago, it just seemed that way. *“But such I have been called for centuries, so I shall not dispute the term if it makes my classification easier for you.”*

Cam scowled. What’s in a name? Enough, he decided. Enough so that he at least would always think of the thing in the crate which even now was in the baggage compartment of the aircraft as a *vampire*. But only because that word was the worst he could summon up from the depths of his unconscious.

Again his fingers moved toward the jacket pocket which contained the cheroots, and again he pulled them back. The hell with Ktara, but there was the professor to consider. Probably the old man wouldn’t even notice the cigar smoke—he seemed to be just staring off into space, in his own private world since they’d left the house this morning—but Cam didn’t want to chance it. There was a bond between the younger man and the old professor which was in its way almost as strange as that between Ktara and her Master.

Not that Cam Sanchez thought of Damien Harmon as a “master” in any sense of the world; but there was that one simple fact. If it hadn’t been for the silver-haired Harmon, one Cam Sanchez

probably would be in prison right now, with the end of the term a long, long way ahead.

The Puerto Rican had been a cop, a good one, too good. It didn't take much for the dope pushers in Spanish Harlem to arrange to plant some heroin in his squad car and it took less to arrange to have it discovered. Without the professor's intervention, and that of his lawyers, the young policeman would have gone to jail. As it was, he was permanently suspended. Out of a job, but not for long. Damien Harmon had been conducting a personal fight against crime since his retirement from teaching at fifty. Whether it was purely a matter of revenge for his back and head injuries or something nobler, he would not say. "This is what I do," he had told Cam. "I'd like you to join me."

That was four years ago, and Cam had joined him. For the first three years their interference in police business had cost the syndicate many lives, some of them taken out by Cam himself. Also there was the matter of the old man's knowledge, much of which had been transferred to his young protege. (There had been others, one a carnival strong man, Cam knew; about what happened to them, the old man never had said one word.) The professor was obviously delighted that Cam had taken so well to electronics—indeed, it was Harmon's boast that the Puerto Rican ex-cop could hold his own in any electronics laboratory in the country, whether industrial or government-controlled.

But there was one large section of knowledge

from which Cam had shied away and successfully so, until just those few months ago. The old man had long had an intense interest in the occult which had started as a years-long study of ESP in his attempts to fix the nerve structural problems of his own backbone. He had not succeeded, but he had enough of the power known as telekinesis to control the mechanism which in turn controlled the being in that long crate.

Which probably was why Ktara had chosen him.

Cam looked around at the woman who sat to his rear across the aisle. Who knew why she did anything she did? She was accountable only to herself—and to the one she called her Master.

He picked up another of the books and looked again at the drawing some quarter of the way through. The book was published in the 1920s, and the artist's name was unknown to Cam. But more than all the words in the entire two hundred twenty-seven page tome, the full-page piece of art summed up the image of voodoo in Cam's mind.

It was a snake with the face of a dusky woman, beautiful in a demoniac way—except for her fang-like teeth which were embedded in the stomach of what obviously was a doll. In the lower right hand corner of the drawing, there was another woman, doubled up in what her contorted face showed the viewer to be excruciating pain, while in the opposite corner a smiling full-muscled black waved his arms about, orchestrating the entire scene which, besides the main characters, contained piles of skulls and other bones upon

which naked blacks danced wildly, their eyes blank, their bodies tired to the point of exhaustion.

The caption under the drawing said: "Under the command of the *houngan* (male priest), the *mambo* (female priestess) transforms herself into the snake-spirit Damballah and punishes without mercy one who has broken the rules of the cult."

The rules of the cult.

As Cam closed the book, he looked up at the back of Harmon's head. The professor had read widely of most of the demoniac subjects. Was the picture Cam had just been viewing similar to one in Harmon's mind? And was the victim's face one that the old man knew only too well?

Voodoo. Some few months ago, Cameron Sanchez would have laughed if anyone had suggested seriously that it could be a reality. That the cult existed, he knew well. But that the power claimed for it might really exist—that was something altogether different. When he was young, his old grandmother tried to tell him, but he'd scoffed at the old *abuela's* tales. Superstitious garbage, completely out of place in this modern world of computers and jet planes.

And he could almost hear her laughing at him from the grave—or from her Heaven which he hoped existed mainly because she would have been so disappointed if it didn't. Her laughing and her chiding him. "*So this modern world is light so bright, is it, niño? Then why you are so afraid on this oh-so-modern airplane ride, hey? You tell me that, you who are so smart!*"

Cam smiled to himself. No contest. There never was, never had been, when the old woman pointed an accusing finger at him for disregarding the old ways. "You are right, Grandmother," he would say, even though he held his real opinion in check. But now, as he thought more about it, as he recalled the events in his life from that moment last August when the name *Dracula* first was spoken to him in complete and deadly seriousness, he recognized something he suspected he had known deep within him all along.

The grand old lady, the grandmother who had raised him to manhood in Spanish Harlem, had been right all along. Absolutely right.

At Ocho Rios there were no customs procedures to bother with, mainly because of the intervention of Atwood Garth, whom Cam had telephoned that morning with their approximate time of arrival. That there was a small payoff involved, Cam didn't doubt, but also didn't care. The woman with them had the power to fix it herself, if need be—to cloud those minds to the extent that the long crate could pass by without notice, let alone a demand to open.

"It's not as heavy as it looks," Cam told Garth's manservant, a tall black named Eli whose gray uniform was straining at the seams over his burly chest and thick arms. As the two men bent down to grip the crate, Cam's eyes shot to Ktara. The woman nodded, and the crate was lifted easily to the waiting station wagon.

Sometimes it was very handy to have Ktara's powers on your side.

The drive along the bay took less than thirty minutes. There was little said throughout that time, except for Garth's comment that tea would be waiting at the house and that a private guest cottage had been made ready for their arrival. Garth was obviously waiting for Harmon to say something of substance. On his part, the professor had been about to, when a glance at Ktara—and her answering shake of the head no, coupled with a tilt of her forehead toward Eli who was at the wheel—was decisive in holding his tongue.

Their cottage was the central one of a line of three on the sloping grounds between the main house and the beach. "You make yourselves comfortable," Atwood Garth said, as the large crate and the other smaller items were being brought inside. "Eli will drive me up to the house and return for you—say, about five. Then we can have tea—and talk."

It was now four-twenty in the afternoon. Harmon nodded. "Was this where . . . where Jennifer stayed?"

"No. She was up at the house with me. I rather thought you would prefer someplace more—well, private. But, if you'd like, there are enough rooms—"

"This will be fine," Ktara said, her pale green eyes scanning the outside of the cottage, but seeming to linger now on the rooftop. "Yes, I should think this will suit us perfectly."

There was something in the way she said it that

told Cam the lady already had discovered something of interest to her. He noticed that the same observation was not lost upon Harmon or, for that matter, Atwood Garth who, half an hour later, when Cam and the professor were shown into the library, inquired:

“Your friend is not joining us?”

“She has other things to do,” Harmon said. He was about to say more when the tea tray was brought in. The young black girl who set down the tray on the table between the men immediately caught Cam’s attention.

She had about her a type of lithe beauty which the short-skirted black and white maid’s uniform accentuated, but more than just her physical presence interested Cam. There was the way she looked at Harmon and him. While attempting to maintain the usual servant’s facade of disinterest in those she waited upon, the attempt failed in that her “casual” glancing at the two visitors was too quick, too jerky. She looked at them as if she were trying to commit every detail to memory. In order to do so, she was overly attentive in the too precise arrangement of the cups and plates of cookies which she had brought, too lingering in her pouring of the tea. Had her eyes not given equal time to the professor, Cam might have thought the girl was attracted to himself in a more basic way. But he would quickly have been disabused of the notion. Once, when his eyes locked momentarily with hers, it took little skill on his part to read the message they unconsciously communicated. It was a message he’d seen often

enough in the eyes of the Count: disdain for one considered to be an inferior being.

"Thank you, Euleila," Garth said. "That will be all."

The man looked visibly shaken, Cam noted. He'd not looked that way earlier, although he was doubtless concerned about the matter which had brought them to his house. But now there was in his manner something very close to—well, terror. When the door closed behind the maid, he came out with it.

"Damien, I am afraid. For Jennifer, for you and your friends, and for myself. The letter—the note I read to you over the telephone—it was right here in this room. It was here when I left this afternoon to pick you up. Now it is gone."

Harmon and Cam exchanged a quick nod. Both of them knew that Ktara could have told them much from a simple handling of that note. "Your maid—the one who was just here," Cam said. "Could she have—"

Garth's hand trembled as he set his chattering cup and saucer down on the table. "No one is allowed in this room, none of the servants—except while I am here. That has been a long-standing rule of the house."

"Obviously someone has broken the rule," Harmon said. "It has occurred to me that you are not master in your own rooms, Atwood."

Garth's face turned a shade more pale. "The same has occurred to me, Damien."

"These people—your servants," Harmon said slowly. "Are they voodooists?"

"I—I don't know. I mean, it never seemed to me to be any of my business to inquire into the beliefs of the people I employ. The staff is small. Eli, Euleila, a cook, a groundskeeper and a couple of men who assist him, a housekeeper. That's it. I have suspected the housekeeper—an old woman called Loala—of being active in the cult, but that is nothing to be concerned about, or at least that's how I viewed it. Lord, Damien, if voodooists were excluded from the workforce on this island, at least a full two thirds of the blacks would be unemployed."

"I am not concerned with their participation or nonparticipation in economic life," Harmon said grimly. "Could any of the people in your household have been responsible for Jennifer's abduction?"

"I don't know. I'm certain they know she is gone. I have no idea if they have any inkling as to what has happened to her."

Cam gestured to the desk across the room. "At least one of them does. The one who took that note."

Garth swallowed hard. "I could question all of them, although I'm doubtful that it would do much good."

"No," Harmon said. "Questions will be asked in due time—at a time when they will be answered truthfully. If, in fact, questions prove necessary."

"Perhaps Loala . . ." Garth began.

Harmon waited.

Garth considered and went on. "She spoke to me this afternoon, just as I was about to leave for

the airfield. I had told her, of course, that we were having three guests and that she should have the necessary preparations made. But, as I was making ready to meet you, she suddenly spoke to me in that slow lazy way of hers. 'Bad thing,' she said. 'A bad thing for those other folks to come here now.' I asked her what she meant but she just shook her head and repeated that it was a 'bad thing.' Perhaps, if we question her together—"

"No," Harmon said.

"But—" Garth now was obviously agitated. "But, damn it, Damien, what are we going to *do*? As we agreed, I've not called in the police. They—the people who have got Jennifer—will be contacting me to instruct me about how the money should be—"

"Don't worry about the money. I have said it is no problem, and it is not."

Garth looked almost relieved. "You—you plan to pay them?"

Harmon smiled grimly. "I do not believe much in kidnapping, Atwood. I find extortionists, under voodoo or any other guise, objectionable forms of human life. No, I do not intend to pay them—not unless it serves my purpose to do so, in which case the money will have little chance to grow warm in their hands before they receive the more real and more just payment which they have earned."

"But—but again I ask you, what are we going to *do*? What can *I* do, Damien? For God's sake, man, tell me!"

The professor's hands gripped the wheels of his

chair. "You, Atwood, should do nothing—except perhaps consume a healthy belt of brandy and get some rest. You do not look at all well."

Garth nodded slowly. "How could I look well, Damien? How could I *feel* well? A guest in my home, a niece of a long-treasured friend. I—"

Cam was on his feet like a shot. "Mr. Garth!"

The look of pain on the older man's face passed. His right hand still, however, clutched his chest. "It's all right. At least, I . . . I think it's all right. I hope . . ."

Harmon's eyes narrowed. "It will be, Atwood. Brandy and rest."

Garth smiled weakly. "They may not be enough. Not if—"

He let the thought end abruptly. None of them wanted to say anything further, none wanted to say the one word which, if it was not in each of their minds, was at least looming large in Cam's.

Voodoo.

"Find Ktara," Harmon said.

Close by the sandy beach, in the afternoon shadows directly to the rear of the bathhouse, the two women spoke in quiet whispers. Both of them, the old housekeeper and the young maid, were kneeling on the earth, the object or objects of their discourse between them. Neither heard the quiet approach of another being and neither saw it—not until it almost was upon them. It was the old woman who spotted the thing, her eyes recoiling in horror from the two green orbs which gazed upon her.

Still watching the sleek black-furred animal, the old woman did something swiftly with her hands on the ground, something which annoyed the younger woman.

"Hey—you covering up—"

"Shut your mouth, girl. You look there."

Euleila looked, then stood. Loala, completing what she had been doing, also stood.

"You see that big she-cat ever before?" the older woman asked.

Euleila shook her head. "Maybe lost."

"No, that she-cat not lost. Look at them eyes. With devil eyes like them, that cat not lost. Move, girl—we get back to the house now."

As the two moved off quickly, they glanced now and then back at the black cat which had not moved from the spot where they had first seen it. The cat's eyes, too, stayed where they had been—on the two women, then it looked beyond them for a moment. The two servants did not notice the shift, however, as they were now looking at the same thing. Someone coming down the pathway from the cottages. One of the new guests, the young powerful-looking man. Quickly, the two women altered their course so that he would not see them.

The black cat waited until they were out of sight, then moved to meet the young man.

Cam spotted her walking toward him. Not a cat, but the black-dressed woman with the oval face and the pale green eyes.

"You're needed at the house. Garth—"

"Your thoughts have told me," she said without

emotion. "Before we go up, there is something I think you should see." Without waiting to see if he was following, she turned and retraced her steps. Reaching the place where the two servants had been kneeling, she carefully lifted the tufts of thick green grass which had been quickly placed there. Under the grass was a slab of thick slate, measuring about a full square foot. She lifted it from its place gently.

Cam looked over her shoulder down into the hole which had been dug into the ground.

The air whistled through his teeth.

"Look at them closely," Ktara said. "But do not touch them."

He did as directed. There were three of them. Dolls formed in clay. The shapes were rough, but it was easy to tell that one was in the form of a woman. Another, the largest, had a peculiar shape to its smooth and shiny head. The third was unlike the others in that, while their legs were straight as if the dolls were lying down or standing, this one's legs were in a seated position and were shriveled looking.

Cam's boot edged purposefully toward the hole.

"No," the woman said. "We leave this place as we have found it." She began the covering process.

Cam felt he should help, but he could not.

CHAPTER 5

"There is nothing wrong with him physically which could cause that type of pain."

They were back in their cottage now. Ktara's examination of Atwood Garth had been complete although she had spent no more than three or four minutes in his presence.

"His body, of course, shows the wear of age, and also the evidence of having lived too soft a life, but there are no particular problems."

"You're saying it's mental, then," the professor said.

"So it would seem. I cannot read this inner mind, however, for the same reason I cannot read your own. But, in that it is not a physically caused pain, that leaves only the mental. At least, the one sharp stab of pain he experienced has not been repeated."

"Not yet," Cam said.

Harmon looked at him. "You think it will be?"

Cam told him what they had seen under the slab of slate. "There no doubt is a little clay figure of Garth as well somewhere."

Ktara smiled. "It would appear that our Mr. Sanchez is becoming more of a believer as each day passes."

"Maybe," Cam said. "But I'm not sure we should have left those things where they were."

"There is an abundance of clay on the island, Mr. Sanchez."

"Ktara's right, Cam. Our destroying those three wouldn't accomplish anything other than to alert them to the fact we knew what they were up to. That, in turn, might speed things up on their part, and that we don't need. Besides, I think we have some time before the dolls are usable for—for their purposes."

Ktara agreed. "They must be personalized first. Each doll must contain something as intimate as possible of the person it represents. I would assume that will be no problem. Whoever cleans up at table, whoever is assigned to tidy up this cottage, has access to whatever elements they require, but it will take time—as will fashioning the clay into more perfect resemblances. Then, of course, there are certain rituals which must be performed and these too will take time."

"How much time?" Harmon asked.

"All things considered, they could be completely ready for use by this time tomorrow."

"One day," Harmon said dully. "They've had Jennifer for more than long enough. It's time we found out where."

His eyes rested on the long crate which rested against the far wall.

Ktara went to the window and pulled back the curtain.

"Soon it will be dark, Professor. Soon."

Loala walked hurriedly through the dark streets. Somehow tonight the familiar walkways lined with ramshackle buildings did not give her the accustomed feeling of security. Even the drums, those wonderful drums of the Power which pervaded the night, served more to unnerve her than anything else. She turned her head again, for what seemed to her to be the thousandth time, to look behind her. No, there was nobody. In this quarter, at this time of night, people stayed behind their own doors unless they had important business on the street. When darkness and the drums came, only those who belonged to the drums dared belong to the night.

Nobody there.

But she had to be certain. She was getting close to the place now. As she had several times before, she cocked her head to the right, so that her left ear—the one that heard best—could be used to its fullest advantage. *But with all them drums. . . .*

And now eyes strained to pierce the darkness, but again to no avail. The eyes were getting so old now, it was hard to tell if there was anything there or not. She reached into the top of her dress with the thin fingers of her right hand and grasped the medallion which hung between her age-withered breasts. Sometimes, just to touch the Damballah would give her special powers. But even when it did not, it gave her a renewed sense of confidence when her spirits were down.

No. There was nobody following her.

She turned and continued her quick pace. This night—*this* night especially—she had not wanted

to make the long walk in. But it was important that she did. The things in the paper bag clutched in her left hand were too important to allow any blunder. Euleila, that sassy young bitch, *she* had wanted to bring the things in, but Loala had been firm. "You just be watchful, you hear? There are things around here to be watching, and they better be watched."

The younger woman had laughed. "You scared, old crone?"

"Don't you go calling me old crone!"

"What you gonna do?" Euleila had asked defiantly. "You gonna tell Daddy Bones on me? You gonna do that? Before you do, you best know that me and Daddy Bones—"

"I want to hear nothing of that!" the old woman snapped. "You just mind you manners—and do like I say. Daddy Bones, he got lots of women whose flesh he admire, but he don't take to no kind of insubordination—"

"*Insubordination?* Where you ever learn a big word like that, woman?"

"From Daddy Bones, that where! In-su-bor-din-a-tion! Just in case you don't know what it means—"

"I know. I know what it means."

"What then, smart missy?"

The old woman placed both fists on her hips and stared eye-to-eye with the younger. "Well?"

"Well . . . well, you don't know what it means, either!"

"I do too! It means calling folks nasty names and not doing what you told! And you better do

what you told, smart-skirts! I don't like one bit them new ones, them three."

"They can't do nothing against Daddy Bones," Euleila said.

"Probably that's right, but they don't look like they about to pay the money, and I don't like that woman with them. You look real close to that woman's eyes? They not like human eyes—uhuh, they more like the eyes of that big black she-cat we see today. So you watch them good, you hear?"

"If watching is so damn important, why don't you watch? I'll take the walk into town. My legs can take it a lot better than those spindly sticks you walk on, anyway."

"I do the walking, little sister! You know what I got to take with me. Daddy Bones, he kill me for giving things so important over to one so young as you!"

Again Euleila laughed. "Daddy Bones—he don't mind giving other important things to young ones like me. Like things old crones like you never ever get to see. No, he don't mind doing that one bit!"

"Child," Loala said slowly. "You got a lot of years ahead of you—maybe. You get as old as me and maybe you know something about a man like Daddy Bones. Maybe you know that a couple of hours in the same bed with him don't mean nothing—zero—when it comes down to what is important and what ain't important. I seen them come and I seen them go, and I tell you this, smart missy. You just hold your quick tongue and be glad for the attention Daddy Bones pays you. It

might mean nothing to him or it might mean something to him, but you blabber all over the world about it, and it will mean something all right—but you won't be liking it much, I bet you that. You keep on the way you is doing—twitching that rear end of yours around like it was a hunk of real tempting meat—and you know what, child? That's all it gonna be. A hunk of meat. Dead meat, which ain't gonna interest nobody—especially you, 'cause you gonna be dead right along with it! Now, you got something else to say before I go? If you do, hurry up with it. I want to be on time, 'cause if I ain't, then old Daddy Bones, he gonna be mad with me, and if he is, then I have to get myself off the hook by telling him about all the bragging you been doing.”

For the first time, the younger woman looked concerned.

“You—you wouldn't go around spreading stories like that, would you?”

“I might,” Loala cackled. “I sure as hell might, smart-skirts. Unless you do just like I say. You hear me good, child?”

Euleila had heard her good—real good, the old woman now reflected, beginning to chuckle but then stopping herself. This whole thing was no laughing matter, nothing at all funny about it. She would be very, very happy when they had the money and the girl, and her people were off this island. Yes indeed, she would be real happy.

She felt it again, that strange feeling at the base of her neck.

She turned her head.

Again, nobody.

Damn it all! She *should* have let that sassy-ass Euleila make this trip!

No, it was *her* right. Daddy Bones had given *her* the important job, and she was doing it. The bag and the things she carried to him were more important, for the moment, than anything going on up at Atwood Garth's house and that cottage.

That cottage.

She'd gotten in there late this afternoon, when all of them were up to the main house. She'd gotten the things Daddy Bones would need—them plus the things from the afternoon eating in the old man's study would be plenty good enough. But she'd looked around a little more. The fearful thing that she'd felt was when she had got near that big box. It was nailed down shut, so she couldn't open it, so she didn't know what was inside. But, when she put her hand on it—

It was cold. *Real* cold! Not like when that air condition equipment goes wrong and it makes your outside skin cold—no, not like that. It was the kind of cold that went through the skin, through the bones, and got you right in the center of you. That big box had something inside it that Loala didn't want to even think about what it might be. But she knew that it was something bad. And that's what she had to tell Daddy Bones, that the three who came to Garth's place today had brought something bad with them. She didn't know what it was, but it was bad. And that green-eyed woman, the woman who had eyes just

like that she-cat—that cat which she never had seen, ever before, around the place . . .

Wait!

Was there somebody following her?

Damballah, Damballah—protect me now, you hear?

No, that ain't no way to be talking to *Her!* Woman, old woman, you out of you mind or something?

Yeah, but you go to Daddy Bones' place, best you not be followed by nobody. Daddy Bones—he say it himself:

“You be followed, and Daddy Bones—he cut from out of you you own livin' liver, and he do it with his big sharp thumbnail!”

But she was in front of the place now. There was nothing to hear, nothing to see. Nobody.

She walked to the door. It was, as always, unlocked. The drums beating their pattern into her mind, she opened the door—and again hesitated. Very strange. She never had felt nothing like this before tonight. It was like there were two eyes looking at her, burning little holes in the back of her neck. But whenever she looked—

She looked once more, one more time.

Nobody.

When the door of the ramshackle house had closed behind the old black woman, an almost silent pair of wings disturbed the air across the way. They had descended from a height not all that great, but so swiftly that, even had there been eyes to see their movement, they would have

had to be especially alert. A blink of the eyelids, and there would have been nothing to see.

But there had been no observer. If there had been, the wings would not have come downward. They would have waited until the pair of red eyes between them had satisfied themselves that the risk of detection was gone.

For the space of four human heartbeats there was no sound in the street, no movement anywhere, including the darkest of dark shadows between the two houses across the way from the door the old woman had entered. And then, suddenly, where there had been nothing, no one, there was.

The black-cloaked figure moved with a stealth which seemed alien to his huge size. Soundlessly, swiftly, he approached the door, and hand reaching from within the great cloak and—

And stopping a full twelve inches from the battered piece of wood.

Count Dracula's eyes flashed with centers of white fury. He could not enter this way. He could move no nearer to the door on which was painted the black cross. He checked the window to the right of the door. A cross was there also, not on the glass but over it. Each of the three windows to the side of the house also bore the symbol dreaded by the vampire, as did the rear door and windows and those in the fourth side of the dwelling place. On every entrance there was the mark which made closer approach impossible. And beside each cross was a second mark. Two sacred

loa snakes entwined around two rods which formed the letter V.

His eyes flashed again in anger. But this time with the anger there was a second ingredient—that of recognition. He had not seen this particular symbol for many years. He never had seen it in what humans referred to as the New World. Its portents were not good for the young Harmon girl, not only from the standpoint of what the symbol might mean, but from its effectiveness. Although Ktara might pass through the door or window which bore such a sign, the greatest part of her powers would be rendered useless by it. She—

But that was of no import—not to him. He had expected to feed this night, and now . . .

But he would not be cheated! It was early yet. He had time. . . .

“Go home, child,” Daddy Bones said to the young girl who, under the angry gaze of the old Loala, hurriedly pulled her yellow flower-print dress down over her nude ebony body. “You go home now, and you heed well the things I have told you.”

Ignoring the old woman for the moment, the *houngan* smiled at the girl. His body was lean and wiry, his pitch-black bare chest showing a sparse but taut musculature. He was not a tall man by comparative standards, but the way he held himself—even in the dirty white trousers he now wore, even shoeless as he was—made him seem to loom over men whose height rose half a foot above his own. He looked to be somewhere in his

fifties, although his smooth-shaved head and bright teeth made it difficult to judge. His face, a threading of cable-like sinew which moved like snakes under his skin, was an object of awe among all who came into his presence. Even when laughing, Daddy Bones' face looked deadly.

He sat back in an overstuffed chair and waited until the young girl's feet could be heard reaching the top of the stairs which led from the basement to the main floor of the house. Then he gestured to the bare-mattressed bed toward which the chair faced.

"Sit yourself," he directed Loala. When she had obeyed, she made a motion as if to present him with the paper bag she held in her left hand, but his own left hand, raised palm toward her, stopped her motion.

"That can wait. I assume it all is there—everything we need?"

"Everything," she said.

"Place it on the bed, then." He smiled at her. "*Mambo* Loala, your eyes tell me you are angry at me. Have I done something to offend you?"

She shook her head no. Her eyes dropped to concentrate on the floor between them. "It not my right to judge you," she said quietly.

"Hey, old black woman," he said cheerfully. "That is no way at all to talk! We been knowing each other for years after years, ain't that so? I know the thoughts that be in your mind, *Mambo* Loala. You know I know them, don't you?"

"Daddy Bones know everything he want to

know," she agreed. But her eyes still concentrated on the floor.

He laughed. "That is a fact, old woman. Right now, them thoughts of yours, they all about what I was doing here with that young girl child. You been thinking that what I was maybe doing with her wasn't all that *proper*—now ain't that so? You don't have to say. I know."

He sighed. "Trust, *Mambo* Loala. You just got to have trust. That girl came in here for me to help her. She been having these pains, these real bad pains, and I was making her right again. Now, there is nothing at all wrong with that, is there?"

"No."

"Then you got nothing to get yourself all angry about."

"I—I got no right, anyhow."

He paused for a time, then spoke to her, again in his soft voice.

"Well, if everything's brought in that bag, I can start the work. You fix them up good?"

She nodded. "I got everything, and everything fixed. They ready. The one, though, that big one. I couldn't get no hair from him." She laughed tentatively. "He ain't got no hair. But he don't shave it none. He don't have to."

Daddy Bones chuckled. "Then he'll be the easiest. I'll work on him first." He laughed again.

Loala laughed too, harder than he did, harder than she really wanted to. She rose to leave, noticing that he now had reached over and had taken the bag from the bed. Since he said nothing at her

getting up, she knew their talk was over for the night. There was more she wanted to say. Like how she felt nervous about this thing, like how she had the feeling that she had been followed coming here, like how that woman with the green eyes and that black cat—

He suddenly looked up at her. “Is there something more, old woman?”

“I just—just wondered about that white girl,” she said quickly.

“The white girl is fine. She is downstairs”—he flashed his eyes to the floor—“and she is just fine. Uncomfortable some, maybe, but fine.”

He looked at her blankly.

“I—I be going now. I best get back.”

Without a word or a nod, he returned his attention to the paper bag.

I shoulda said something! I shoulda!

The old woman shook her head violently at herself as she approached the door to the outside. She could again hear the drums now, and they made her uncomfortable. Old Daddy Bones, he didn’t fool her none with all that talk about giving doctor-type attention to that girl. Wasn’t nothing wrong with that child nohow no way. But that was okay, if he wanted to mess with the women, that was his business. In one way, it even was a good thing that he liked that girl; she would tell off that sassy bitch Euleila, all right! “You think you the only one? Hah!” That’s what she’d tell that black smart-ass. But, even so, Loala

didn't like the way Daddy Bones was *spending* himself like that.

It was okay—and necessary—to do that kind of thing when the ritual called for it. But doing that kind of thing just now, when he had the important job of fixing up them dolls—that could weaken his power. Loala's mother had told her all about that. There were stories about *houngans* who had lost their powers completely because they hadn't been careful about spending themselves.

The old woman shook her head again. No, that wasn't what she should have told him about. It was all those other things that were bothering her.

She opened the door to the outside and the full impact of the drums met her ears. They did *not* sound right. Somehow . . .

But it was just her nerves. Her insides weren't like the insides of young people. More and more.

Suddenly she wanted to go back inside the house. But she couldn't. No, Daddy Bones had dismissed her. She had to go back to the Garth place. She wished she were there already. She wished that she had sent Euleila here instead. Hah! That would have been a real good one. Euleila instead of herself walking in on Daddy Bones and that other young girl! Except that Daddy Bones would have known what to do. He would have just told Euleila to wait for a while, and she would have done like he said, and then after he'd gotten done with that other girl, he

would have spented himself even more with Eu-leila—

Damn, damn. A long way back. Best start now.

She passed through the doorway, closing it tightly behind her, and moved off as fast as her thin legs could move her. She was puffing by the time she'd gotten two houses away. *Them drums . . .*

Three houses away she stopped still in her tracks.

There was something lying in that alleyway there. Something—

Feet? Legs? It was hard to tell in all this dark.

She took two hesitant steps closer, then a third—then her trembling fingers went up to her open mouth.

They *were* feet and legs—and at the bony knees there was the hem of a dress. A yellow flower print!

"You are in time."

She spun swiftly around to the place the voice had come from, the voice which had sounded so strange and deep—as though it had come from the depths of a deep cave. He was there. Closer than she'd imagined he'd be, *he was there!*

"It is good that you have come, Loala," he said. His voice was perhaps meant to be comforting, it was so smooth, but it wasn't comforting. Not to the old woman, it wasn't. He was a *white* man—but his white skin was whiter than any white she'd ever seen before. And his eyes . . . and that mouth. The teeth looked so . . . so . . .

"You stay 'way from me, you hear?"

He smiled as if she'd said something funny—but it wasn't funny, it wasn't! She tried to move backward, to get away from this white man, but she couldn't. Her feet couldn't move!

"Loala," he said. "You act as if I'm a stranger."

"I—I don't know you, mister. I don't know you at all!"

"But you should, old woman, you really should know me. After all, you are a person of the signs, are you not? Are you not of the congregation of Damballah?"

Her lips began to quiver. "I don't know nothing about no Damballah!"

He shook his head, the smile still on his lips. Red, very red were those lips of his. Red like—blood!

"Loala, Loala," he sighed. "It is one thing to deny knowledge of the Serpent when asked idly about it in ordinary circumstances. It is quite another to deny her. Are you denying her, Loala? Before you answer, before you decide what your answer will be, I want you to do two things. I want you, first, to listen to the drums. They almost seem to be calling Damballah to witness what your answer will be, don't they?"

And then he was quiet, as the drums entered her ears—even her bad one. They seemed to her to be more meaningful than ever. Yes, he was right. It was as if Damballah—she might be right here!

The white man's eyes flashed—in a strange red color.

"I mentioned two things, Loala. Would you like to hear the second? I want you to."

"Y-yes."

The white man took a step nearer to her. She noticed now that he was big—bigger even than those of the walking dead she had used to—

"I want you to remember a second thing when I ask you of your knowledge of the She-Serpent. I want you to think about meeting her upon your death. False-swearing is a thing the great Damballah does not like. So I will ask you again. Just before you die."

"Die? *D-die?*"

There seemed to be something happening to his face. The hair on top of his head seemed to be—*was!*—coming downward. Those red lips were pulling back and—*the teeth!*

"The young girl. She was a good meal, Loala. I have hungered long for such a meal. And, yet, I hunger still more. You are old, Loala, old for humans. I wish to enjoy you as a finish to my dining. As, one might say, a brandy of vintage."

"Please—please, don't hurt me!" Still her feet would not move, yet her entire frame began trembling. "Please!"

"*Do you acknowledge Damballah?*"

"Yes—yes!"

His teeth—those horrible teeth—they were inches from her throat now!

"And the young Harmon girl—is she inside that house? The one from which you came?"

"Yes—she is—"

But she did not have a chance to complete the

statement. Evidently she had said enough. Evidently *he* no longer cared to hear anything she had to say.

With swiftness, with a searing-hot slicing, his razor-sharp teeth entered her throat.

CHAPTER 6

“He killed her,” Harmon said. “He *killed* the woman!”

The small communicator lay on the scarred oil-cloth-covered table before him. The unit was tuned into another, smaller one which had been implanted behind the Count’s right ear. Harmon, Cam and Ktara had heard both of the killings.

“You said nothing to him,” Ktara said. “You did not command him to stop.”

“Would he have stopped had I done so?”

Ktara lifted her shoulders in what might have been a shrug. “You did not command him, Professor. I cannot read your mind, as you know, but when my Master took the first girl, I watched your face. One of the enemy was being slain—one of those responsible for what has happened to Jennifer. That was the emotion which showed. And when my Master approached the old housekeeper—”

“All right! That’s enough.”

The woman smiled. "It is enough for me. It is enough that you recognize that you are the one who had unleashed the weapon of your vengeance, and that you are the one responsible for the form it takes. He could not enter the place. I have told you of the mind signals of my Master which told why."

"But he did not have to kill her!" Harmon replied. "The old woman's death will serve only to put them on their guard."

"Maybe," Cam said. He had been quiet for the past several minutes, his face tense as the two murders were transmitted through the communication system he had devised. "Maybe that's good."

The professor looked at him with curiosity.

"A foretaste of disaster," Cam explained. "In the old days, when our war was with the syndicate, we used to apply the same principle. Take one of their boys, slice him through the throat, and leave him leaning against one of the bossmen's door. While it served to put them on their guard, as you say, it also served to make them nervous as hell."

Harmon's voice was expressionless. "We are dealing with different animals now."

Ktara agreed. "These are much more superstitious. I think Mr. Sanchez may be right. I think your Daddy Bones and his followers will be shaken by these two deaths."

"Shaken?" Harmon almost snarled the word. "Yes, they may well be shaken—right down to the soles of their feet. Right to the point where they

feel they'd better dispose of the cause of what has happened: Jennifer. Has that thought crossed either of your minds?"

The question went unanswered.

Breakfast at the main house was at nine. Garth felt well enough to come down to share toast and coffee with his guests, and Cam took the opportunity to ask him some questions, the answers to which might be helpful in the day ahead. He waited until just the four of them were in the room.

"How many?" Garth repeated. "Hundreds of groups, I would say—well, at least a hundred on this island. Each of the 'churches' follows its own personal *houngan* or *mambo*, sometimes both."

"Any rivalry among the groups?"

"I suppose there is some. People like myself, of course, never hear about it, and I dare say the police don't either. But I would be surprised if there wasn't some jockeying about for position or revenge for some slight or other. Every now and then we hear of a ritualistic killing, although I really don't know what such a thing entails. But, for the most part, I understand that the groups operate pretty much independently with what is basically a live and let live philosophy."

Garth looked up suddenly from his coffee. "I'm sorry, I suppose that live and let live business was badly out of place."

Before anyone else could comment, Cam pressed on:

"We've heard of one leader. Daddy Bones. You know anything about him?"

Garth put down his cup. "Daddy Bones. Is it Daddy Bones you suspect might be behind—er, this incident?"

"He might be," Cam said. "I just wonder what you knew of him?"

"Well, of all the *houngans* on the northern shore, he probably is among the most influential. Ah! Here's Eli—I'll ask him. *Eli!*"

Ktara and Cam exchanged glances as the big black approached the table.

"Mr. Garth?"

"Eli, we were just discussing Daddy Bones. I said that he probably was one of the more influential of the island's *houngans*. Would you agree?"

He's afraid! was the message which crashed into Cam's head. But he hadn't needed Ktara's help to interpret the widened eyes of the black manservant.

"I . . . I dunno about such things, Mr. Garth. Honest, I don't."

Garth nodded. "Very well. That will be all for now, Eli." When the servant had exited, Garth turned to Harmon. "I don't think he's telling the truth."

The professor's eyes turned to Ktara. "What did you get?"

"Get?" Garth asked.

Ktara smiled. "I'm unusually sensitive to people's emotions, Mr. Garth." To Harmon she said, "Fear. That's all. There might have been some

other—emotions, but the fear was so strong within him to blank them out.”

“Eli? Afraid?” Garth turned his head toward the door from which Eli had left. “You don’t think he had anything to do with . . . Should I get him back in here?”

“No,” Harmon said. “The name of Daddy Bones itself might cause the reaction we saw. Is that not right?”

The question was put to Ktara, who nodded yes.

Garth took up the nod. “You probably are right, of course. For a moment there, I saw a way in which I might be able to help.” He smiled weakly. “You know, the master of his domain, Atwood Garth, ruthlessly putting his man to the question. I wish . . . I really wish, Damien, that there were something I could do to help.”

“I understand your wish,” Harmon said. “But, no, there is nothing you can do at this point. The next move is Cameron’s.”

“Next?” Garth repeated. “Then you’ve already made your first move?”

Harmon rubbed his jaw reflectively. “One of us has. Indeed, one of us has.”

“Owenga—owenga!”

She was young and of savage beauty, and she was afraid. She was afraid of what she saw on the floor before her and of what it meant. She also was afraid of the man whose eyes flashed at hers.

“It is true!” she wailed. “The no-blood of them

two. The slashing on the throats. It is the blood-drinking *owenga!*"

And now it was not just his eyes which flashed, but his fist. He hit her hard, to the side of the head.

"Shut your foolish mouth," Daddy Bones said menacingly to the girl who had joined the two female corpses on the floor. "I don't want no more talk like that. Not to me, not to nobody. You understand?"

She rose to her knees, her eyes avoiding both him and the bodies in front of her.

"I understand."

"Best that you do, child. Now, I got a job for you. There is a shack up the street from here, one in which nobody is—you know the one?" She said she did. "Good. You take these women up there. You walk them up, one at a time, just like they were hurt real bad. You can carry them like that, right?" She nodded. "Good again. Now, you just take them there and leave them. If you see anybody—anybody at all—and they look at you funny or they ask you what it is you are doing, you tell them that they under Daddy Bones' care. You got that?"

"Yes."

"Then be at it." He turned to leave, then he swung back around to face her.

"And, child, I want no more talk about *owenga*. That's just a story the old people brought with them from across the sea. Ain't no such thing, you hear me? You best hear me good, because I

know—and what I know, I don't want nobody saying different. You understand that real good?"

"I—I understand, Daddy Bones."

Without another word, he turned and left the room, moving deliberately, unhurriedly into the main floor hall and to the stairs leading downward. He took them at the same measured pace, so that those ears which might be listening for some kind of weakness in them would be disappointed. Daddy Bones was in command! That was the image which had to be ever forward. Sure, he had his powers, he had the knowledge, but he knew that he was not invulnerable. A quick, sharp piece of steel thrust between his shoulder blades would have the same effect on Daddy Bones as it would on any of his followers. The followers, of course, weren't all aware of that fact, believing that the healing powers of the *houngan* could cure almost any wound. And they could, true enough, given enough time—which, of course, he wouldn't have if he was dead!

Daddy Bones laughed, the snake-lines of his face dancing as he did. At the bottom of the stairs he entered the large, dark, empty basement room and headed to the wall on the right. A makeshift doorway opened at his touch, and he passed from the basement into another, located under the house next door. One basement was pretty much like the other except that there were no stairs down from the house which now rested above him.

This basement room was large and lighted by three bare bulbs. Four women and a man sat at a

long wooden table. All of them were old. They had been chatting together as Daddy Bones had entered—chatting and working over three objects which lay on the table. The dolls of the three white people visiting Garth.

“They coming real good,” Daddy Bones said appreciatively. He gestured toward the opposite wall. “You want to unlock that for me?”

One of the women rose and took from her blouse a long and rusted key. Where only a knowing or very keen eye could discern a slot in the wall, she inserted the device and pushed against the flat of the panel.

Half of the wall swung inward on heavy concealed hinges. When his fingers depressed the switch, the underground room—this one two houses further along the row of shacks above ground—became alive with a ghostly light which alternated green-yellow and red-purple. The old woman with the key grinned wide. Seeing her do so, the *houngan* chuckled to himself. The little transparent color wheel which rotated in front of the half-hidden fluorescent bulb was pure trickery—nothing compared to what he *really* could do—and yet he suspected that this one piece of trickery alone was responsible for much of the loyalty his flock paid him.

But no time for such reflection. He had come here for a purpose.

The purpose stood against the wall to his left. Stripped of all her clothing and chained.

Daddy Bones laughed. “How you liking them chains, white girl? Manacles, they’re called. Slave

chains. My people came to this New World of yours wearing such. Wearing them just like you—except that you at least can sit down in comfort if you want to.”

What he said was true, as far as it went. The manacles had been set so that if Jenny wanted to sit she could do so, but only with the shoulder-and chest-pulling strain of the steel links against her hands. In a standing position her wrists could go down only as far as the bottom of her ribcage. Thus, for the most part her almost sleepless hours here had been spent standing. It was the number of hours which the *houngan* addressed himself to.

“I’m thinking to cut short your stay, white girl. I was gonna send my directions for the money tomorrow, but I’m thinking tonight will be best. What do you think about that?”

Weary as she was, Jenny looked at the black man with fierce eyes.

“My uncle won’t pay you one cent!”

“You not worth that much to him?” Daddy Bones laughed. “Yeah, I know. The old white man’s saying about how you’ll spend millions for defending yourselves but not one cent for—for whatever it was.”

“Tribute,” Jenny supplied.

“Yeah, that was it. Tribute. But I think you wrong, white child. I think this rich uncle of yours will pay what I ask. I think I might even speak to him myself.”

“You? He—Uncle Damien is *here*?”

Daddy Bones chuckled. “You maybe shouldn’t look so happy about it, girl. Him coming here—

that was a big mistake. He just should of stayed right where he was and just sent the money like he was told. But, no, he couldn't do that. And in a way that's all right with me, 'cause if he doesn't care about you all that much he might care about himself. You understand me?"

"He won't pay," Jenny said defiantly.

"Won't he, though?" He turned to the old woman who had entered the large room with him. "Bring me her doll."

The woman went to a rack on the wall close to Jenny and took something from a thick wooden shelf. When she had given it to Daddy Bones, he held it up so that Jenny could get a good look.

"This is *you*, in case the likeness ain't all that clear. This funny little hunk of clay with its funny blonde hair—that's you, white girl." He laughed.

"You find something funny?" Jenny asked. She had the words out before her brain could issue countermanding orders. *For God's sake, Jennifer, just shut your mouth!*

"Yeah, missy, I find something powerful funny." The *houngan* looked at the old woman for a moment, as if debating whether or not to continue. Evidently he decided in the affirmative.

"There's been some talk. Some of my followers—they are worried because you were brought here. White girl! They ain't used to having the magic worked on the white folks. And then what happens? Two of my flock gets themselves killed. And the talk has started. They are talking about the *owenga* being here."

Jenny reflected. "*Owenga*, The white-faced blood-sucker."

The old woman behind Daddy Bones gasped. "She *know!* She the woman of the *owenga!* Damballah protect us!"

Daddy Bones turned upon the woman with deadly eyes.

"That is trash you speak! We know who this girl is. We know all about her. Do you understand me? She is not the mate of the *owenga!* There is no such being as the *owenga!*"

"Yessir," the old woman said. "You are right, Daddy Bones. We know this girl, all about her. We know that—"

The ferocity of his face shut her mouth. He turned back to Jenny. The face remained as it was. Jenny shrank back against the wall.

"Maybe this uncle will pay when he hear you scream—maybe?"

When he'd completed the question, he dug his thumb into the center of the doll. Jenny doubled over with a groan.

"What I was talking about was a *scream!*"

He pushed in harder.

Jenny obliged.

"And that was just a little pinch, white girl. You just wait till the real pain comes."

He laughed and turned to the old woman, giving her the doll.

"You give this girl something to eat. She make any trouble for you—any little *little* bit of trouble—you just twist the neck of the doll some and she'll quiet down. After you feed her, I want you

to tell the people. Tell our own people to be here tonight. Tell them who are *not* our people to stay off the streets. Tonight will be the night of the walking dead. You tell them that."

The woman's eyes widened into almost perfect circles. Her slackened jaw could hardly pronounce the words:

"The walking dead?"

Daddy Bones smiled maliciously. "You know their name. Why don't you say it?"

"I—I don't want to!"

"Say it."

"*Zombies!*" she cried. "*Tonight the zombies walk!*"

CHAPTER 7

That's him.

Shrinking back further into the dark shade, Cam Sanchez reached automatically inside his jacket for the .357 Magnum. He scowled at the absence of his favorite weapon, remembering that Ktara had made him leave it in the glove compartment of the old Chevrolet they had borrowed from Garth. "This isn't one of those occasions when your pistol-play will resolve anything," she had said, and as much as he disliked it, he had to agree with her.

That's our Daddy Bones! And your Jennifer still is alive. He's just left her.

The big Puerto Rican watched the thin black move up the street. Deep in the shadow between two shacks, a shadow that was in dark contrast with the brightness of the early afternoon sun, he could still see the green eyes of the cat, the rest of which he could not see. He did not speak to the animal. He did not have to. He let his thoughts do the talking.

Our Daddy Bones. Your Jennifer. Odd use of the possessive, to my way of thinking.

She is of you, she is the Professor's and, by extension, yours. Also, there is a certain bond of affection between—

Cam's eyes narrowed. "Enough of that," he whispered. "I don't want to hear it!" He knew what she had been about to say with her mind. She had said it before: Jennifer Harmon was in love with one Cameron Sanchez. Cam had disputed the whole thing. "She's a child!" he'd said, laughing at Ktara's statement. He admitted that they'd "gotten along fairly well" since he'd worked for Harmon, "and maybe she did show a little bit that she admired me some, but all girls have their puppy loves."

At which, Ktara had laughed. "This *child* is now nineteen, Mr. Sanchez. And it is no schoolgirl romance, no idealization of some romantic white knight she sees in you. Precisely speaking, she is in love with you. What do you say to that?"

Cam, at the time, had said nothing. He had wondered, however, just what Damien Harmon

would have said to *that*. Now, at this time, he again chose to sidestep the issue of Jenny's affections.

Our Daddy Bones? he asked mentally.

Correction: my Master's. But that will be later. For now, you have your work.

In that, at least, she was right.

Leaving the darkness and stepping out into the empty street, he walked quickly between the two rows of dilapidated houses until he came to the one he wanted. Just before he reached its front, however, he again slipped into darkness, this time into the shadowy separation between the *houn-gan's* house and that next to it. Silently, he moved to one of the three windows, the middle one, and just as silently his right hand slipped inside his jacket and brought out a container. An aerosol can.

Cam pointed it at the space just above the window and thumbed down the white plastic head. A fine spray of brown paint came from the nozzle for less than three seconds. Then he moved to the window of the right and repeated the process. Although it was dark, he could see that the job had been well done. The color of the paint was very close to that of the aged wood of the house side. More important, however, was what the paint had covered up.

The cross and the double-snake symbols.

He took from his jacket pocket a hand-size communicator. The control button was in the "on" position. "Completed," he said softly. "Middle and right windows, alley side."

The unit went back into the pocket, its one channel still open. Then, leaving the paint can under a pile of rubble in the alleyway, he cut around to the back of the house. If anyone had seen him enter the alley, he wanted to be sure he wasn't seen coming out the same way. It might make somebody suspicious, and a suspicious somebody might decide to have a closer look. The idea, simple enough, was to come out the back way and work his way across again to where Ktara waited, with no lingering at all to the rear of the target house. Very simple idea. Cam should have known better. His long experience with such matters had proven time and time again that the simplest ideas are ones which seem destined to fail.

The click of the hammer was recognized immediately for what it was as his face emerged into the sunlight.

Euleila held the small automatic steady in her hand, steady at his chest.

"You want in, mister gentleman, you go in," the tall black girl said. She still wore her maid's outfit with the ultra-short skirt. Beautiful, Cam thought to himself.

"Around to the front," she ordered him. "No, not back through the alley—around this way."

Cam suppressed his smile. She was making two mistakes. The first was not going through the alley, where she might see—but, no, that wasn't a mistake on her part. She was smart not to enter such darkness. He could easily take the weapon



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from her in there, and she evidently realized it. But the other mistake, that was real enough. Bringing him around to the front. Ktara would see what was happening. One flash of white from those green eyes, and Euleila would be stunned to stillness. He'd seen Ktara do it before. No problem.

"As you wish," he told the girl. He raised his hands over his head for emphasis as she moved back to allow him to pass her with plenty of room.

Around to the side of the house they walked, and then to the front. "Open the door," she said. "It's not locked."

Cam did as he was directed, but slowly. His slowness would be interpreted by the girl as not wanting to make any move whatsoever which might appear sudden. She accepted it as that, it seemed.

"Come on, you—hurry it!" she said impatiently.

Right, he said to himself, then he asked the logical question: *Where the hell was Ktara?*

"Open the—"

"Okay, okay!" He turned the knob abruptly and pushed the door inward. He hesitated for two heartbeats, then stepped inside.

Ktara wasn't going to help.

Damn her! But then he smiled. Of course.

Ktara wasn't stupid. She knew what she was doing. She would know that he had accomplished his main mission, and that now the symbols on the windows were gone. She could enter that way—with her full powers. By letting him be taken inside—

Of course.

"I said for you to hurry!"

He smiled at Euleila. "Your wish is my command," he said genially. Of course. Ktara was taking advantage of the changed situation. With Cam inside, the two of them might be able to free Jenny all by themselves. There might be no need to wait until nightfall when the Count—

Her Master, of course, would be furious, but then there would be a little mopping up he could handle. Daddy Bones, for example.

"Downstairs. Go down the stairs," the girl with the gun told him.

Obligingly, Cam obeyed, smiling at the three young girls who stood at the top landing. Two of them smiled back—a mistake, as it turned out.

Euleila's voice lashed out like a cracking whip. "You keep you eyes off of him—and you hands too! This one is mine—if Daddy Bones let him live."

Cam stopped and turned to face her, "Euleila—I didn't know you cared."

"What that supposed to mean?" The gun still was pointed straight at his chest.

"What it means is that I didn't think you liked me. I liked you, from the first moment I saw you."

"You talking trash, white man!" she snapped. But the half-smile of her lips told Cam that he had struck a responsive chord.

He smiled wider. "Come off it, girl. You know damned well you're good-looking."

"You right. I know it," she said without any trace of modesty. But there was no sense of bragging, either. It was a fact, pure and simple, and

she was acknowledging it. The workings of her primitive mind did not allow much for indirectness. "*But—*" she added.

"But how I look or how I don't look don't have nothing to do with why you is here. You the friend of the rich man who is the uncle of the girl. You try to find the white girl, that why you here."

"What makes you think that?" he asked. Stall for time, Cameron, help is on the way. You hope.

"You talked about Daddy Bones. Back at the big house. Eli heard you talking about him."

Cam nodded. "So Eli knows what you've done? Good old reliable, steady Eli."

"He don't know nothing. He know about Daddy Bones. He come to this place, because he know of Daddy Bones' power. But he don't know nothing about who took the white girl and why. But he will, he will! He just happen to say to me what you say to Mr. Garth."

Cam frowned internally while holding the smile on his lips. Good old Eli. If he had been in on the deal, Ktara would have picked it up. As it was, he just had a blabbering mouth—

"Move it—down the stairs. Before I shoot myself a white man."

"Okay. But knock off that white man stuff."

She looked at him with suspicion. "What you mean?"

"You know what Puerto Rico is? You know *where* it is?"

She shook her head no.

"Never mind. The fact is that I come from there. I'm *not* a white man—not, at least, ac-

according to those who consider themselves white men.”

“But—but you work for the white man. The rich one.”

His eyes narrowed. “So do you, baby. You work for the white man too. Does that make *you* white?”

She had no ready answer. Nothing but a thoughtful look which lasted about two seconds, then she gestured with the gun.

“Maybe you right. Maybe you tell the truth, maybe not. Maybe Daddy Bones know. But now you go downstairs—okay?”

“Okay,” he said. He turned and went down. Following her directions he moved from the first basement room to the second. There, four old crones and a grinning old man sitting around a table looked at him with interest but not much more.

“The key,” Euleila said.

One of the old woman stood. “Daddy Bones said—”

“*The key!*” the girl with the gun repeated.

“I just told you—”

“And *I’m* telling you—you want me to tell Daddy Bones that you wouldn’t give me no cooperation? You want that?”

The old woman considered. “No, but—”

“Unlock the door.”

Cam watched as the old woman hesitated, then reached inside her dress. Moments later, part of the wall had swung inward.

“Inside,” Euleila prodded him.

He obeyed.

"*Cam!*" Jenny cried out. Her eyes were bright with recognition. Cam could not miss it. And neither could the black girl with the gun. *Sorry, Jenny*, he said to himself, knowing she could not hear it, but having at least to think the words in his mind.

"Shut your damned mouth!" was what he said out loud.

"Cam?" Now her face was pure disbelief.

"You heard me. You're a spoiled rich brat and always have been. Now you've been taken down a peg. But don't look for any help from me—*white girl!*"

Cam cursed himself at the tears he saw streaming from Jenny's eyes, at the tremors of her body which was wracked by the sobs he now heard.

"You mean them words?" Euleila asked.

Cam looked at her with a scowl. He was boiling with rage and he knew it. So much the better.

"You got *ears?*"

The automatic stayed where it had been.

"I got ears, but I also got eyes. If this white-she is nothing to you, you show me that. You show me real good. You go right over to where she is—and you spit on her."

Swallowing hard, Cam looked at the black girl and then to Jenny, whose face now had lifted and whose eyes tried to seek out his own. When he turned back to Euleila, his laugh was sadistic.

"I guess I can spare some. If it takes *that* kind of fluid to please you—although I would have guessed that it might be *another* kind—"

The black girl's teeth flashed as her lips curled back into a smile which was a combination of sex and sadism.

"Maybe later—maybe. But you do what I said. You spit on her."

Where the hell are you, Ktara?

He quickly assessed his chances. His body was powerful enough, he knew, to rip Jenny's chains clean out of the wall. First, he'd have to kill the black girl with the gun—okay, he probably could do it. But there were others outside and he was below ground with just one way out.

He couldn't make it. Not with Jenny. Neither one of them would make it.

"You hear me?" Euleila said.

He knew what was going to happen, knew what he was going to do. His hand slipping into his jacket pocket, his fingers found the red button of the communicator. There was no earthly reason why his employer had to hear what was coming next.

"Sure, why not?" he answered the girl. He walked to where Jenny stood, stopped and loomed over her upturned face. It was a face which reflected horror. Horror from what she already had experienced, and horror from what was happening now.

"Cam. . . ."

There was nothing of embarrassment in her voice. Nothing of the shame of appearing before him naked. There was but pleading.

He scowled at her. "I'm not quite the John

Pure-blood you thought me to be, Mistress Jennifer."

He spat on her, his spittle landing just under her jaw—on her throat and dripping downward into the valley between her blossoming breasts.

The white girl screamed as if her mind was shattering, and the Puerto Rican—although his face showed no emotion—focused his mind narrowly as he turned his back on the chained girl and faced the one with the gun.

You got what you wanted, lady, but when the time comes, when the showdown comes, it won't be saliva on your throat. It'll be my hands—snapping your head from your shoulders so damned fast that that smile on your face will be frozen until the very bones in your skull turn to dirt!

Euleila laughed, a deep throaty laugh. "You a good-looking man, you know that?"

Cam grinned. "Thank you," he said. She had lowered the weapon and he took a step toward her. He had a fleeting moment's knowledge of what might happen—happen right here, right here and now—when the old woman, the one who had the key, entered the room.

"They is starting to come," she said. Her eyes shifted disapprovingly from the black girl to Cam and back again. "Euleila, you better tend to you own business. I can take that gun and watch this one."

Euleila laughed. "Watch him? Old woman, you don't know nothing. He one of us."

"I don't say so. Daddy Bones, he not said so."

"But he will. You just wait and see if he don't

say so. This man is one of us—and he can do just what he want around here. You understand?”

The woman paused. Then she nodded, her next words dashing the hopes Cam already had been forming.

“All right, he do what he want. But not in here. I got strict words about that from Daddy Bones. Nobody does nothing in here without his say-so. So, both of you, out—now.”

Euleila looked from the woman to Cam. She shrugged.

“There are other rooms,” she said with a smile. “Let’s find us a quiet one.”

During the tour of the upstairs, Cam considered what his next moves should be. The girl’s gun was no longer trained on him, although she kept it in her hand, yet as each minute passed it became clearer to him that the odds against his getting Jenny out of there safely all by himself were insurmountable. The big door to the dark room in which she was kept was closed now, locked, and each step he took from the stairwell diminished his chances. But that wasn’t the worst of it. The house was beginning to fill up with people, all of them anticipating a “big thing” that was going to happen tonight, all of them wanting to do their bit to make sure it all worked out as planned.

“What big thing?” he asked Euleila.

“You see. When the time come, you see real good. Then maybe you know what kind of power your rich man boss think he better than.”

While she too was elated, she also was angry. There was no available space which was empty enough for the purpose she had in mind when they had left the downstairs. Then suddenly her eyes lit up. "Wait here," she told Cam. "I want to check something."

Left alone, Cam walked about the place with no challenge. He wanted to be sure he had his bearings straight, sure he knew where everything was in relation to the two windows which he'd unblocked for Ktara and her Master. The only time he was stopped at all was when he was deemed to be getting too close to the main entrance. Two muscular black men now stood guard just inside the door, but it was not one of them who warned him.

"I wouldn't go no closer if I was you," a heavy voice said from behind him.

Cam turned and shook his head with a grin. "What would Mr. Garth say if he knew you were here, Eli?"

The manservant grinned back. "I don't guess he'd like it much. I don't guess he'd like it much at all."

Cam nodded agreement. "What's this big thing everybody's talking about?"

Eli reflected. "The big thing tonight? Well, the walkers are supposed to come, that's one big thing. But then there's something else, which most of us don't know about—and them that do, they ain't talking."

"Walkers?"

"Yeah. You know, them that—"

"So *here* you be," Euleila interrupted. Eli at once backed off a couple of paces, but she ignored the black man. Her eyes were only for Cam.

"I got us a place—where we can be alone for a while," she said in what was almost a whisper. "But we got to hurry. The place is Daddy Bones' private room."

She led him through two rooms and unlatched the door which would open her chosen inner sanctum. Cam didn't much like the way some of the others were looking at them. One of the women in particular, frowsy-looking and thick-waisted, shook her head in disapproval.

"Hey you, Euleila—you oughtn't not be messing around in there. Not when Daddy Bones not here."

The girl's eyes flashed with ferocity. "You watch you tongue, woman, else maybe I rip it right out of you head. Or maybe I just tell Daddy Bones you been stealing from him or something. Maybe he believe what I say against what you say—maybe?"

Cam watched the older woman's face. Hers—as well as those around her—looked frightened. Whatever power this girl had, it worked. At least with these older ones, anyway. He knew he had to be very careful now. This was one lady he did not want to offend in any way.

When the door had closed behind them, Euleila said huskily, "They won't come in here. Nobody come in here without Daddy Bones say so."

Cam checked out the entrances to the room. One door, the one they'd come through, and one

window, its dirty panes facing the darkness of the alleyway. From his previous reconnoitering he knew that this had to be the central of the three, one of those he'd cleared of its mystic signs.

Except for two chairs and a battered bureau, the only piece of furniture was the large tarnished brass bedstead with its offwhite mattress, the latter of which no doubt was responsible for the slight touch of mildew in the air. Although that might just be his imagination. The entire house had the smell of rot about it.

"Come on," the girl said. She stood to the side of the bed now. "A big man like you ain't afraid of me—maybe?"

Very efficiently, her fingers moved now to the front of her maid's uniform. As it fell to the floor and was followed by what she had been wearing under it, she placed her hands on her hips and looked at him with a taunting gaze which combined elements of the animal and the imp.

"What you think? You like the way Euleila look?"

He smiled appreciatively. He did not have to fake any of it. He still had not forgotten his wish to choke the life from this savage black girl, but now within him there arose a desire so basic that it drowned out or buried the other feeling in the pulse-beat of his pounding blood. The familiar stirrings in his loins were accompanied by an unfamiliar intensity of those stirrings. As the black girl stretched out on the mattress, Cam's own fingers went to his jacket.

He had one arm out of it when the door crashed open.

"Take him!" a thick voice commanded.

The three of them who charged into the room were big and brawny and had the look of killers about them. Cam reacted in kind, whipping around with his half-off jacket so that it flashed out like a whip, the metal button on the lashing sleeve slapping into the face of the nearest man—right smack in the eyes. His cry of pain was followed by a second from another of the three as the toe of Cam's right boot found its crunching target in the left side of the other's jaw. The third man took a powerful palm-heel to the forehead and the knife-edge of the Puerto Rican's left boot to the breastbone. It was as he went down that Cam felt the sharp crack to the side of his head.

Staggering from the blow, his hands raised to defend himself from another—but there was nothing to defend himself from! Two of his attackers were down, the one remaining standing still temporarily blinded from Cam's jacket thrust. There was no one else near him! Only the frightened girl on the bed behind him and, in the doorway—

He recognized the man in the white suit. He had seen Daddy Bones' face and shaven head only briefly outside in the sunlight, but then that face had been expressionless. It was not expressionless now.

The steel-cable sinew of that face was rippling with pure rage, even as the seemingly contradic-

tory smile revealed the cruel white teeth within his mouth. The eyes of the *houngan* moved from Cam to the girl on the bed.

"You gonna pay for this, girl. You gonna pay real bad!"

"No, Daddy B—" she tried to plead, but her frightened sobs choked off her voice in a torrent of trembling.

"As for you," the black man said to Cam, "you gonna die tonight. You gonna die wishing you was never born!"

"Try me now," Cam said through his teeth. He shifted his weight to his forward foot. From behind the voodoo leader, he could see more grim faces. All right. It was a tight spot, but he had been in tight spots before.

"Come on—try it now."

Daddy Bones laughed. "Okay with me, boy, if you want a little demonstration, but I don't want to kill you—not now." From behind his back the *houngan* whipped an object that Cam at first thought might be a gun. It wasn't. It was just a doll.

Just?

Wrong word, Cam realized, as a stab of pain went through his right shoulder. As Daddy Bones' hands did something to the lower part of the figure he held, Cam's knees buckled beneath him. Even before his hands moved out to break his fall, there was another slamming of something hard to his head. Then still another which brought fiery suns to burst behind his eyes. His face lifted from the floor to try to focus on the doorway, but as the

suns began to fade a thick black cloud of unconsciousness slowly took their place. All he could see—and that just for a moment—was a laughing mouth. All he could hear was a kind of echo which might have been the rush of blood within him or might have been words which he might be hearing now or might be merely his memory shooting them back to him.

“Yeah, boy. You gonna wish you were never *ever* born!”

CHAPTER 8

Pounding pounding pounding. Flashes of colored lighting. Pain, agonizing pain, everywhere. In his chest, in his stomach, in his limbs, his head, behind his eyes. From somewhere in the back of his brain, Cam Sanchez received the message that he was no longer unconscious, that the sounds and lights were not things he was generating internally, but messages which his senses were registering from the external world. Still, it took him time to accept what seemed to be a totally bizarre idea—that all this could be real.

It was a voice to his right which brought him across the dream barrier.

“Cam—can you hear me?”

A girl's voice. Familiar, one he should know.

Jenny—Jenny Harmon. He turned his head to the source of the voice, intending to try to open his eyes. They already were open, he discovered to his surprise. The lights alternating their colors—they had to be real, then. And the sounds—they, too, had to be—

“Cam?”

“I—I’m sorry, Jenny. I guess I—botched—”

“Don’t try to talk. You’re hurt.”

He now saw that she was standing beside him, still in chains, still nude. He looked down at his own body. He too was naked, but his arms had not been chained, nor his feet. He was standing with his back leaning against the wall, his arms close to his side. But she was right. He was hurt. Even though there were no marks on him that he could see, his insides felt as if they were a peasant soup concocted from his innards and personal bone meal. Hurt, yes, but they’d made a big mistake. He wasn’t hurt quite as badly as they had no doubt figured.

“Cam—”

“Quiet.” He wanted her quiet. He didn’t want anybody knowing he was out of his deep sleep yet. *God, the noise!*

But even as his brain recoiled from the sounds, he recognized them for what they were. The air was full of drums, beating in counterpoint rhythms, several of them coming from within the huge basement room. The room Cam now saw to contain at least fifty or sixty people.

Systematically now Cam took in the entire room. At the far side, there was a crudely built al-

tar, draped in black and containing several implements which his eyes could not identify in the alternating hues of light. He found the light source quickly enough—above the altar—and recognized what it was without actually seeing the hidden device. Very simple, but no doubt effective among the minds of the superstitious. Speaking of whom—they lined the two walls adjacent to the altar and the wall upon which he and Jenny had been placed. Correction. There was a third person.

Euleila stood to his left. Naked also, her wrists and ankles were bound by thick hemp. When he'd last seen her, she had been trembling. Her eyes wide with fear, she was trembling still. As he looked at her, he thought she might turn toward him, but she did not. All she had eyes for was the front of the room. The altar—and the empty space which formed the center of the room. Empty of people that is. There was something there. Something that Cam's eyes did not greet with pleasure.

It might well be that it would be up to him again.

He looked back to Jenny, concentrating his focus on the chains holding her. They looked sturdy, but where they were attached to the wall they just might be able to be broken free. Checking to be sure no one was watching him, he flexed the fingers of his right hand and slowly moved it to get a grip on the chain. Except that he didn't. He couldn't. *He couldn't move his hand or his arm at all!*

He tested the left arm. It was the same. Both of

them were held immobile at his sides. He had control over the musculature of both limbs, but when he tried to move either of them upward or outward in any direction, it was as if they were held to his trunk by invisible bonds. He now tried to take a small step to the side with his right foot. He could not. It was bound to the left. He could move both together in slow diagonal heel-toe alternations, but that was all.

"The shelf," Jenny whispered.

He looked at her. She in turn nodded her head toward his struggling arms, then turned her eyes to the small wall shelf beyond her, some five feet from where she stood.

There were six dolls on the shelf. One of them, the closest, was very familiar. Cam understood now. The doll, the one which looked like himself, was wrapped the length of its body by a wound cord. If there had been any doubt in his mind that this thing called voodoo really worked, he had no doubt now, none at all.

"Cam," Jenny's soft voice came to him. "What can we do?"

He tried to smile at her. "Nothing. Not until the sun goes down."

"That's some time from now, I think," she said. "They talked about a meeting tonight, and though they've already gathered, there's been no formal opening."

"Jenny," he said. "About what happened earlier—about what I said and did—"

She smiled at him now. "I understand, Cam. I

didn't then, I admit—your act was terribly convincing.”

“Not to everybody, unfortunately,” he said, turning toward the center of the room with glowering eyes.

Her whisper again came to him. “You said something about the sun going down. Is that when help is coming? Does Uncle Damien know where we are?”

His face was taut as he answered. “He knows.” He said nothing more because at this moment he wasn't sure of anything else. Harmon knew where he was. So did Ktara. If it was in fact night, there was a chance. But there was also that item which commanded the otherwise empty center of the room.

That huge wooden cross with the symbol etched into its top. Two sacred *loa* snakes entwined around two rods which formed the letter V.

The drums suddenly stopped—those in the room at least. From some distant place there was the muffled sound of other drums, their rhythms seeming to seep through the walls and the ceiling and the very floor. But the sound, disconcerting as it might be, faded into the background completely as the lone figure moved out into the center of the room, in front of the cross.

Daddy Bones wore just his white trousers. His figure looked more imposing than ever as his eyes swept the room in a slow rotation of head and body. When the circuit was complete, there was

hardly even the sound of breathing. There was no movement either, except for the eyes, every pair of which followed each and every movement the *houngan* made, even the minute movements of his facial lines, even the up and down motions of his cruelly smiling lips.

"Children," he said, "there is the smell of death here with us tonight."

He waited before he went on. It was the dramatic pause of an experienced actor, waiting until the silence in the room had grown to its fullest intensity, then continuing.

"We witness death here tonight. When the dark night comes, we also witness and do honor to the dead who walk. That is our duty, and tonight we do that. The time is not here right yet, but there is other business to do." His smile disappearing, his eyes narrowing, he stepped toward the three naked captives.

Stepped toward them and—without even a glance at the three—moved to the shelf to the right of Jenny. He took in his left hand one of the dolls. Then he turned back to his congregation and held it toward them.

Cam had seen that it had not been the doll cast in his likeness. Now he saw whose likeness it was. Jenny gasped.

"There is a man," the *houngan* said somberly. "A rich and powerful white man, who has the belief that he can do harm to us. He has made threats against us—against me. We do not like this thing, this threatening—do we, children?"

There was no answer. The stillness remained,

but the build-up of tension in the room was so thick that Cam thought it could be sliced with a knife.

The alternating colors played across the face of Daddy Bones. The *houngan* held the doll close to his face.

"Maybe I just bite off the head—maybe?" He laughed shortly. "No, I don't do that—not yet. But this man who try to hurt us, he need to know that his threatening can be turned back on himself by them who has the power. I think we show him that. I think we show him that right now!"

From his trousers pocket his right hand took a long hatpin. Without a word he held its point to the right shoulder of the doll with the white hair and the shriveled-looking, twisted legs.

With a quick thrust he sent the point completely through the shoulder.

The brandy snifter crashed to the floor as Damien Harmon cried out, his back slamming against the backrest of his wheelchair.

"*Damien!*" Atwood Garth shot up from the leather chair in his library and rushed to his guest's side. "Damien—what is it?"

Harmon's left hand clutched at his right shoulder. The muscles of his face relaxed from the taut, painful wince they had held. "I . . . don't know. I—"

Again it happened—the searing pain wracking his body, almost pitching him out of the chair. Had not Garth's hands held, that probably would have been the result.

"Damien—is there something I can do?"

Harmon smiled grimly. "I don't think so. Not unless you've got an effective counter for what's happening."

"You mean—"

"I suspect so. In fact, there's no doubt at all in my mind that—"

He was ready for it this time, both hands firmly gripping the wheels of the chair. Even so, it took him almost two full minutes to restore his breath to something like normal.

Garth's face was one of ashen fear. "Maybe a doctor—I could have one here in fifteen minutes."

"No," the professor gasped. "Just take me to the cottage."

"The cottage? But you said that your friends have gone. You'd be alone there."

"Please—the cottage. That's where I want to be. I . . . don't think I can make it there . . . by myself."

Garth saw that the man had his mind made up. There was nothing for him to do but to acquiesce.

"The day is almost gone," he commented as they moved to the outside.

Harmon nodded. His eyes already had sought out the place on the horizon where the sun was moving on its well-worn path to nightly oblivion. "Yes. Almost."

"You act as if you welcome the night, Damien." When Harmon did not comment, Garth looked around from behind the chair to be sure he was conscious.

"I'm all right—for the present, anyway. I was just listening to *them*."

"The drums, yes. There will be more of them after dark. If I were you, I'd try not to dwell on them."

Harmon laughed sharply. "I'd say that was a lot easier said than done. In any case, some time before dawn, I have the feeling that there will be fewer drums beating out their rhythms, not more."

Once they were inside the cottage, Garth wanted to remain with his guest, but Harmon insisted that he be left alone. "There are things I must do."

Things he must do. One thing, one very simple thing. He could do it now, even before the sun had gone, if he could concentrate hard enough—

It was his left shoulder this time. The pain entered and spread throughout flesh and bone, through the arm all the way down to his trembling fingertips. As it receded, Harmon shut his eyes tightly, conjuring up within his mind the vision of the implant with its tiny lever. He held his breath, imagining the finger of energy which moved forward the lever. Just a small space to go, now. Just—

In the flash of new agony which attacked him, the mental energy dissolved. Quickly he restored it, but it would take time to move it back to the point where—

Time. He had performed this mental chore scores of times, and had mastered it to the point where he no longer concerned himself with the

time element. It could be accomplished in an instant.

An instant. A fallacy in itself. There was no measurement of time—nor of anything else, really—which could not be broken down into smaller units, divisions which were infinitesimal in number.

Closer! With a movement that was both swift but all too slow, the mental finger gained its objective. Now all that was required was the final push, just one—

A bright orange sun burst behind his eyes. Where the pain began, what part of his body had been the focus of attack, he didn't know—and didn't care. His laugh was triumphant as his mind wrapped itself around the orange explosion and used it—used *it* to power the final—

It was done!

He collapsed against the back of the wheelchair, realizing now that he almost had been standing—*standing!* Years ago, he had begun his study of telekinesis with the primary goal of repairing the damage to his spine—performing an operation by thought that the world's top surgeons had told him could not be accomplished with all their knowledge. All his attempts had failed. Ktara had told him that all future attempts would result in failure as well. He had accepted her verdict. But now—just a moment ago—the combination of that orange something in his mind and something else—

Was there hope after all—after all these years? Could he hope to marshal that force which—

He cried out from the invisible stabbing into his forearm. *Walk?* He exhaled the unspoken question with a rush of air. He had been thinking of walking when he should have been thinking about something much more basic.

Surviving.

If they killed him . . .

But they wouldn't—couldn't—not until they had what they wanted. A dead man can't sign a check. No, they couldn't kill him, not yet.

Unless—

Unless they misjudged their power and killed him by accident. That could happen. Or unless—

They might not want the money now. To him, Jennifer was worth much more than that cash. Was it possible someone else might feel the same way? And if so, why? For what purpose might she be—*used*?

Over the casket now, he could see the sun. Somehow it looked no lower in the sky than it had when he'd left the main house. It was just hovering there—taunting him, refusing to move even while knowing full well that his life and Jennifer's, and probably Cam's too, depended upon—

A shaft of searing heat cut through his brain. In the thunderclap which followed he heard his own shout of protest—or thought he did. He didn't know whether he actually voiced the words or not, but amidst his place in the agonizing hell there was one small grain of satisfaction to be taken in the fact that he had registered his rage

with the universe at large and in particular the star which is our sun:

"Die, damn you! DIE!"

CHAPTER 9

"Stop it! Please stop it!"

Daddy Bones looked with disdain at Jenny. "White folks don't do no talking in this place, rich girl. *Nobody* does no talking when Daddy Bones is conducting his meeting. But maybe you afraid I gonna kill this old man with my pin? Maybe I do just that—but not now. Maybe he had enough for just now. I think maybe that's so. But instead, maybe I stick a pin or two in *that doll there!*"

His eyes flickered toward the shelf. There was no doubt in Jenny's mind that they had rested briefly on the image molded in her own image.

"Is that what you want, white girl?"

"No," she said quietly.

The tendons in his face whipped about as he grinned. "That is good, 'cause there ain't that much time for me to oblige you. We got other business to take care of, that we do. Bring me the new figure."

An old woman, the one who had kept the key to this underground room, stepped from the wall and approached the *houngan* with an expression

on her face reflecting what she considered to be the proper level of somberness and also her status as having been chosen for a part, no matter how small, in the proceedings. For one brief instant, Cam saw an additional something in the woman's face. As she passed by them, her eyes seemed to brighten as they alighted on the naked black girl to Cam's left. Neither he nor Euleila missed the fact that the doll the woman held carefully in her fingers also was naked and black. If there had been any doubt as to whom it represented, Daddy Bones, upon receiving the likeness in his own hands and handing the old woman the Harmon doll, dispelled that doubt.

"Take the woman to the altar," he said.

One of the two men who moved toward Euleila was the big man servant, Eli. As they took her arms, Cam could see her eyes appeal to the big man who had worked in the same house as he had. His eyes communicated nothing. No sorrow, no pity. Nothing.

Cam had expected the girl to scream, to shout out a protest or to beg for mercy, but she did none of these things as she was dragged to the altar at the other end of the large room. When before it, the two men turned her around so that she was standing with her back to the altar, facing toward the congregation. Her eyes, wide with terror, seemed to see no one in the room except the *houngan* with the doll.

"Release the ropes," Daddy Bones commanded.

Two sharp knives severed the bonds which had

restrained wrists and ankles. Daddy Bones moved forward, parallel with the big wooden cross.

"This woman—" he said, addressing the others in the room. "This woman has done us all a dishonor. She brought that one"—he jerked a long index finger at Cam—"into our place of worship, into this very room! We got ourselves some rules about that, don't we, children?"

No one said a word, but every one of the flock nodded his or her head. The nods were exaggerated, as if each of them wanted to be sure their leader saw that he or she was in full agreement with his pronouncement.

"So this woman, she broke that rule. She brought that man here, right here into this room. And then she took him all through the upstairs house. That man—that man who she knows is a man who works for that same rich man who thinks he can threaten us. Euleila—why you do such a thing? *Why?*"

The last word was shouted. The black girl, however, did not open her mouth to respond. Perhaps she had seen and heard similar questionings before and knew that no answer she made would make a difference. Or perhaps she knew that she was not expected to answer. Daddy Bones seemed not to require one, in that he allowed little time for any reply at all.

"Oh, I know why. I surely do know why. Lots of us know why, Euleila. They might be some of us who think he might have hoodooed you, that he maybe put the eye on you and *force* you to do

what you did. Lots of talk going 'round, Euleila, about this here man being *owenga*!”

There were gasps of horror throughout the room. Cam had no idea what the term meant but, whatever it meant, it was nothing good. Hell—right now what *was* good?

But Daddy Bones dispelled the notion of Cam's being whatever it meant:

“Him? *Owenga*?” He laughed out loud. “Look at how he can't move none of his muscles! Look at how his power ain't nothing compared to *my* power. No, all you who wants to talk about *owenga*, you talk all you wants, but that don't change the truth. *Ain't* no *owenga*! Never has been. That just an old people's story from across the sea, and that all it is and ever has been. Daddy Bones—he say so, and he know!”

The *houngan* turned around toward Cam and smiled.

“But if he not be *owenga*, he still an enemy. Didn't he kill two of us just last night—one being the *Mambo* Loala? Didn't he do that? Sure he did that—he did that for that rich old man he work for. And then he got the stupidity to come back here today! Did you ever see such stupidity, my children?”

Again the heads about the room communicated the desired response, but this time it was an exaggerated long drawn-out shake of the head as the echo of Daddy Bones' question disintegrated into silence.

“I did. I seen such stupidity. I seen it today, when I walk into my room upstairs in the house. I

seen it when I seen that black girl there with this here man—in *my room*! That is so much stupidness that I almost can't believe it. I almost can't believe that my eyes is seeing what they is seeing. But there it all is, right there, so I got to believe what my eyes is seeing. It is *there*!"

He paused, again taking advantage of his sense of the theatrical. "It was there. So I ask myself—why? Why, *why*, WHY!"

He laughed easily, almost cheerfully.

"And then I know why. Euleila, she a real girl. You know, she got in herself a real girl's feelings. And so I look at this man—sort of, you know, through her eyes—and then, then I see why. Then I *know* why. This girl, this here black girl, sold us out—us, her friends—for the temptations of the flesh. Her sin against us, my children, is a sin of the flesh."

His voice now grew solemn.

"The flesh is weak, the white men always say. And they is right about that. The flesh *is* weak. But the mind is not—the mind which is thinking about proper things, right things, *real* things, is not weak at all, in no way! That mind which is thinking in the right way, that mind can't be overpowered by the flesh. But her—*her* mind was overpowered. And it was because of her sinnin' ways. I . . . I tried to help this girl. I tried to make her see right. A lot of you knows that—right?"

Sagely, the heads bobbed up and down.

"Sure. And what comes back to me for trying? You know what comes back to me. I *just told* you what comes back. So I say to myself, I say, all

right, Daddy Bones, all right. This woman did you and your people this way because of the yearning she has for the flesh. So I say to myself—I say, then let her have the flesh. Let the punishment be just like the crime. Let her have all the flesh she can take—*and then some!*”

Suddenly now it was not just the captive’s eyes on the leader, but all of the eyes in the room. Their puzzled looks seemed to say that they did not quite understand—that they had expected some type of punishment, yes, but they weren’t clear in their minds as to what the *houngan* was referring to. Daddy Bones, on his part, having gotten his listeners in exactly the state of mind he wanted, dramatically lifted the black doll he held high above him. Grasping the arms of the figure, he pulled them upward. Instantly, the girl leaning against the altar lifted her arms over her head. Her eyes grew round with sheer terror as Daddy Bones now inserted a thumb between the knee-joints of the doll. Then he laughed out loud:

“No, child—it ain’t gonna happen like you think!”

Laughing again, he separated the doll’s legs, while to the front of the room, Euleila’s feet seemed to slide apart.

“She wanted flesh, this black girl. So shall she have it! Which of you men will be first? Come on, who? Don’t wait to be asked—she is there, waiting! Take her, one of you!”

The drums began to sound—the ones within the room.

It was Eli who, without a word, grasped the

girl and flung her up to the altar. As he climbed up after her himself, Daddy Bones roared over the drum beats with glee:

"There's a *good* man! Now, come on, come on—*all* of you men got to do it! That's what Daddy Bones say, and you *got* to do it! And all you women-folk—don't you go thinking bad thoughts about your men. They is doing this because it is something that got to be done. Now—come on! I want somebody up there just as soon as he is finished!"

"*Good God!*" Jenny whispered to Cam. "They're going to kill her!"

Cam snapped his head around to face the chained girl. "Shut up—unless you want to be next! *This is no game we're playing!*" His teeth were clenched and his voice was pure venom. When he was certain he'd driven his point home, he turned back toward the altar.

Eli was climbing down. With a wink of satisfaction, he clapped the next man on the shoulder as Daddy Bones himself moved forward to push a third man into line.

"Quick now, real quick! We ain't got all day. Any minute now that sun gonna drop behind the hills—and when that happen, the walkers come. So hurry—*hurry!*"

"Walkers?" Jenny whispered.

"The dead who walk," Cam whispered back. "He mentioned them earlier. Don't worry, though—he probably doesn't mean it literally."

"Cam—when they took me, when they came and

took me from Mr. Garth's there were men who walked and looked like they might—"

"Jenny, be quiet! Please—and don't worry about any walking dead. There's no such thing."

Her taut face relaxed just a little, and Cam swung his away from it. It was a lie, of course. But he was hoping that the one example of the walking dead *he* kn^ew of was an exception. He hoped to all that was holy that, aside from the Count he had restored in that underground Transylvanian crypt, there was no such thing as the *walking dead!*

So much for hope, he told himself less than fifteen minutes later.

The drums announced that something was happening. It was the beat of the drums outside the basement room which began it, but immediately those within the room changed their rhythm to match that which had seeped through the walls.

There were several reactions within the four walls. Some of the men frowned—in particular those who had not yet had a chance to mount the altar at the front. The women whose men had been so affected looked for a moment as if they would burst from their gloating. But even these men, these women, quickly took on the visage of those of their brethren who had no personal emotional displays. That visage was one of awe—a mixture of respect and terror—and complete quietude as those who had assembled in this underground room seemed to pull themselves back, to shrink back, as far against the walls as they could.

"Do not fear, my children!" Daddy Bones cried over the sound of the drums. "They are here only because we are here. For there can't be dead bones unless there first has been live bones! Rise, all of you—rise and pay respect to them who come to this house. They are dead, but they walk! They are dead, but they seem to live! Such be the mysteries of *voodoo* that such can take place—and such be the power of Daddy Bones that they honor us this night. Stand and praise! *For the dead are here!*"

"Good Lord!"

Cam heard her from behind him, he having turned to get a better view. When he turned back he saw Jenny's eyes widen and then grow cloudy. He attempted to shoot out his arms to help her before she—

But he couldn't, of course, and he stood helplessly as she sagged down to the floor as far as her chains would allow her. Good enough, Cam decided. Unconsciousness might well be a boon this night.

He had not noticed before, especially, that the wide swinging door which was the only entrance-exit to and from this room had been open. He noticed it now, however, because of the four beings which had just come through that opening.

Beings. Yes, that was the right word. They were male, he deduced, but they were not men. They might have been men, once, but now—

They were gigantic in size. Or they looked that way in comparison with the men whom they passed upon coming into the room. On second

thought, they probably were no bigger—in length and breadth—than Cam himself. Yet . . .

It was not their stature so much which made them different. It was, in part, the way they carried themselves. Shoulders stooped, heads hung down as if they were not walking under their own power, but were being drawn along by some invisible chain. And, indeed—

Daddy Bones seemed to be doing just that. He had moved deeper into the room now, stepping backward, pace by pace, his hands drawing back from in front of his chest into his chest, as if he were a puppeteer and these men his puppets. Careful was Daddy Bones not to disturb the black doll he clutched in his left hand, but his eyes were not on the girl who still lay on the altar. No, his gaze was on those four, those—

Not *men*, no. Cam realized that fact in the instant that the drums stopped their beating—the side ones as well as those inside the room—and the *non-men* lifted their faces toward the huge wooden cross, next to which stood the triumphant Daddy Bones.

Their eyes!

They had no eyes!

No, that wasn't right. They had eyes and eyeballs, but none like those we know. There was nothing but white. No pupils, no surrounding circles of color, nothing. Just whites. *The blank eyes of the living dead.*

In the silence, Daddy Bones' laugh seemed almost maniacal.

“The darkness has been announced by our friends from the grave. We welcome you, friends. It is said that the living should do homage to them that lie dead. It also is said that, because of this, the dead owe the living something in return. These dead, they owe everything they are to us—to us right here, to the magical powers which made them what they are.”

His eyes gleamed bright as he looked into the faces of his frightened flock. “But tonight *we* do homage. We thank our friends from the grave for their services to us. We give them a gift. We give them a black girl for their very own. We give them—”

The sudden scream from the altar was that of an insane person. Euleila forced herself up into a sitting position. “No! Daddy Bones—please! Pleeceeeeeeaaaaa—”

Even though her body slammed back to the top of the altar from the manipulation of the figure in the *houngan*’s hands, she again struggled halfway up.

“Please—kill me! Just kill me!”

Daddy Bones laughed.

“I don’t *got* to kill you, child. Them four gonna take care of that real good. After they do what they do!”

He again touched the doll, this time on the face. The black girl’s gaping mouth suddenly closed tightly. She appeared as if she had been about to scream, but now she could not. She could not move at all. She sat there, mute and stiff

upon the altar. Except for her horrified eyes, she might have been an ebony statue of some goddess.

Satisfied that all was as it should be, Daddy Bones barked a command to one of the men standing against the wall to his left. The man detached himself from the crowd and handed the *houngan* a small object. As Daddy Bones turned to face Cam, the Puerto Rican recognized the object for what it was.

"This was in your coat. Looks like some kind of talking radio, the kind you can use to talk to somebody. Now, I just figure that the only other somebody you might be wanting to talk to was that rich old man up on that hill. Right now, before we get down to the business everybody is come here for tonight, I want to talk to this old rich man. I want you to tell me how to use this thing."

Cam nodded. "Sure. Just free my hands and I'll show you."

Daddy Bones laughed out loud. "That's very good, very good. But I think you can tell me. I think you *better* tell me, else I'll just walk back to that shelf of dolls there and do some things to yours." He looked at the unconscious Jenny. "Or hers, maybe."

Cam nodded again, this time in resignation. "The red button. Just push it forward."

Daddy Bones smiled down at the communicator, then looked up at one of the old women. "The doll with the twisted legs. Bring it here."

Harmon's head jerked around to the table and the communicator which lay on the top of the soiled oil cloth which served as a covering. The open line signal! Impossible—the communicator channel was already open, hooked into the unit behind the Count's ear. Unless—

Unless it was Cam's unit which was giving the signal. That might mean that somehow Cam had managed to—

"This is Harmon!" he said quickly into the receiver.

"And this—*this is Daddy Bones!*" came the reply.

"I've been expecting a call from you," the professor said. "But your method and means I find to be rather ingenious."

"Rather ingenious," the voice on the other end repeated. "How about them pains you had earlier—you think them ingenious too? Or maybe you want to know just how I know about the fact that you had real bad pains today?"

"I believe I know," Harmon replied.

"Good. You got you a pen—and a checkbook? You got them handy?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You know *damn well* why I ask! I got that little rich girl right here with me, and I got that big man who work for you here, too. If you want, I can prove that—if you can recognize the sounds of their screaming!"

"I don't think that's necessary."

"Neither do I. I think all I got to do is—"

He did not complete the sentence. He didn't

have to. Harmon doubled over from the sudden pain in his stomach.

"You *understand*, rich man?"

"I—understand," Harmon gasped.

"Tonight is the night for paying up, old man," Daddy Bones said.

"That's right," Harmon said with effort. His eyes went to the center of the room where the coffin lay. The empty coffin. "That is right," he repeated.

"You gonna write out that check?"

Harmon's voice was grim. "I'll write it. To whom would you like it made out?"

"To cash. Good old *Mr. Cash!* That way him or anybody else can cash it in, right?" The *houngan* laughed at his joke. "Then, when you got it written, you take that check and you put it in the mailbox down by the road of the place. You know where it is?"

Harmon said he knew.

"Good. So you write now, real clear. Made out to good old Mr. Cash—fifty thousand U.S. dollars, right?"

"Fifty thousand—"

"You got any questions?"

"No. No questions."

"Real good. 'Cause if you had any questions, there maybe would be some more pain. Like *this—and this!*"

Harmon hardly could breathe. His chest. It felt as if his ribcage was being gnawed at by hungry, sharp-toothed dogs.

"*All right!*" he groaned.

"All right!" Daddy Bones said, tossing the communicator to one of the men standing near the drummers. "That is that. And now maybe we get on to the ritual, yes? I think maybe for the first part of it we let Euleila be *mambo*. We got no *Mambo* Loala no more, so we let her play the part. *Drums!*"

CHAPTER 10

They began. It was as if a lightning bolt had crashed somewhere nearby, its light unseen—or somehow absorbed by the ever-changing colored lights already within the interior of the room—but its thundering clap tearing the very air in its attempt to burst the eardrums of any victim within hearing distance. The drums began that way, and the pitch and level of loudness remained that way. The rhythm, however—

The rhythm was wild. Even so, Cam was soon certain that it was a rhythm completely familiar to the devotees who had gathered in this underground room. Immediately their bodies began swaying, male and female alike, old and young, and soon the swaying bodies moved from where they had so docilely stood against the walls out into the center of the room. Then, from the open doorway, flickering lights began to appear. Can-

dles, ten—no, twenty—no, more. Passed from hand to hand until their solitary lights among the all-pervading color-changing light were spread throughout what Cam now thought of as the “dance” floor. Then, almost as if upon signal, the holders of the candles bent down and placed them on the floor. It was—

Weird. For a moment Cam forgot the personal predicament he was in and gave his full attention to the scene before him. The candles had been placed seemingly at random, but if that had been the case it had been a casual placement which had happened so many times that it had become unconscious pattern. For what the rows of bright flames really were was a type of obstacle course through which the congregation danced.

The dance itself appeared to be a primal form of what you could see in any discotheque in any of the world’s modern cities. Were it not for the exaggerated movements, the suggestive pattern of the drum rhythm, the overall strangeness of the accompanying symbolic artifacts and the location, it could have been nothing more than a social night out—one of those poor folks’ block parties which Cam, who grew up in Spanish Harlem, was only too familiar with.

And yet at those long-ago, almost forgotten functions, even though the women and men paraded a certain promiscuity, there was nothing of the pure sensuality that Cam saw here. No, *pure* was the wrong word. For here there was no nuance of a wink of an eye or a slight raising of a hip—here was *raw* sensuality. Where the flat of

the hand was placed, not *suggestively*, but *operatively* upon the flanks of one of the opposite sex, whoever happened to be within grasping range. Neither could the look of acceptance which the grasper received be misinterpreted. It was a look of defiance as well as acceptance—a kind of “I dare you to try that again” look. Invariably, the action was tried again, accomplished again, and the receiver invariably looked back to dare the “toucher” to go further, if he dared. And, invariably, he dared.

It was at one time both a spring rites festival and a drum-accompanied orgy, but not one restricted to any one time of year. Cam had dipped into enough of the text of those books he’d brought along to recognize it for what it was. This *was* the primary voodoo ritual—and it would end in either one of two ways. Either the sexual orgy would complete itself in mass sexual acts or—

Or there would be a blood sacrifice of some kind.

“Look at them, big man. Look at them.”

Cam had not seen Daddy Bones move to his side.

“Beautiful, right? Maybe not from the beautiful sense you think you know about, but from the sense of power, it is real beautiful. I control them now—not just like I control them usual-like. Usual-like it is a thing of them respecting my power, of them being real afraid of what I can do if I get mad at them. But this—this is complete control. If I tell them right now to rip each other apart and eat each other’s own flesh, you know

what? They would do just that very thing. You believe me?"

"Does it matter if I do or don't?"

Daddy Bones shrugged. "You right, it don't matter at all. But hey—look at that one on the altar. Acting as if she can't get enough of *anything*, maybe thinking she a real Erzoolie!"

Erzoolie. Cam recognized the name of the black Venus in voodoo belief, a goddess who was insatiable when it came to sex. Beautiful or hideous, depending on how she chose to be at the moment. *Erzoolie*. As for *Euleila*—

She did act as if, for the time being, she thought she was a goddess of sexual love—or that's the way it seemed to him, although he might have quarreled with the word *thought*. He had not missed the way in which the old woman who now held *Euleila's* doll whispered into the place where the right ear was represented. Whether or not that was the cause of the black girl's behavior, or whether it was the beat of the drums, or whether it was something else, her performance was dramatic as hell.

She had risen to a standing position on the altar surface, but it was not a stationary pose. Far from it. To the beat of the drum, her shoulders rolled, her head swayed, her hips thrust forward and backward in wild gyrations, outdoing in both impact and ferocity the movements of the others who danced beneath her. As if planted on top of all these motions was a sinuous upward and downward dipping, the knee joints and backbone behaving as if they were composed of a substance

as fluid as the rivers of perspiration which flowed into and down through all of her bodily crevices. She turned, she whirled, she dipped, she shook her entire self wildly to the drum rhythms, adding her own writhing counter-rhythm which, far from being out of syncopation, was in fact super-syncopation.

The performance was, in short, perfect. The girl was the physical embodiment of a love goddess, one which could not get enough, one which even now craved the body of some lover, one who—

Lover. Cam's eyes shot again to the four *zombies*, realizing that they only among all those in the room—except for himself and Jenny—did not participate in the dance. They stood now, their shoulders round and bent, their faces down so that he could not see them. It was as if they had been dismissed for the moment, as if the action around them or perhaps Daddy Bones' words had told them they need not pay attention to the goings on. If this ritual dance was in their honor, it was plain they didn't care. They were waiting for something else.

Or someone else.

Cam's eyes returned to Euleila, whose own eyes had shut tight. A sign of the ecstasy she was enjoying? Or, rather, a blocking out of the reality to which she had been brutally sentenced? Or neither, but instead nothing more than the maneuvering of a part of a figure of clay which was designed to resemble her?

But even as he looked at her, her eyelids opened, seemingly with a sudden *click*. Her gyra-

tions stopped dead. She stood completely motionless for a full three seconds.

Then she screamed.

The scream ended, the very last part of it filling the room which otherwise had been shrouded in silence.

The drums had stopped.

No one in the room moved, their bodies frozen into whatever pose they had happened to be in at the time of the girl's scream.

No one moved at all—not even the *houngan* himself. Not until the girl herself began to move. When she did—

Cam couldn't believe his own eyes.

The snake was about forty inches long and its hide consisted of yellow, black and green bands. A coral snake of some kind, a one-fanged being of venomous character. It had come from somewhere under the altar—a sliding trapdoor, probably, since Cam could see that nothing had been lifted upward—and now had wound its upper portion around the calf of the girl's right leg.

Again the girl screamed. But this time the scream was not one of terror, but one resembling the emotion of triumph. The scream. Her eyes, however, did not look all that triumphant. They looked, in fact, as if their owner had been drugged.

The drums began again now, a new beat, a slow, tantalizing beat. And now the members of the cult straightened from their previously-held positions into which they had appeared frozen. As if orchestrated, they stamped their mostly bare

feet down on the candle flames and straightened and turned, all of them, to face the altar.

The snake now had wound its way upward to Euleila's thigh, a thigh which was trembling in almost volatile shudders as the snake's head rose ever higher.

"Damballah," said Daddy Bones softly, moving from Cam's side to a position near the upright cross. "Damballah!"

"Damballah!" cried the congregation. *"Dam-bal-lah, Dam-bal-lah!"*

And now the drums moved into a three-beat rhythm, matching the chant of those who whispered, then shouted, in three parts the name of the chief voodoo goddess, stressing the final syllable with a strength which seemed to assist the banded snake in its upward journey.

"Dam-bal-lah . . . Dam-bal-lah . . . Dam . . . bal . . . lah . . ."

Again and again, the name was repeated. Inch by inch, the coral snake made progress up the figure of the black girl. Part by part, Euleila shook her body as the creature reached it. Her weight balanced upon her left leg now, her entire right leg up to the hip was in motion—and now her stomach began to vibrate in the one-two-*three* of the tumult which filled the underground room. Her stomach, then her breasts, then shoulders, then neck, then her head. They all were in motion as the banded creature reached its own head upward and wound it loosely around the girl's neck.

"Dam-bal-lah! Dam-bal-lah!"

Cam himself was beginning to fall into a trance

from the drone-rhythm-charged air. He might well have done so, had not something caught his eye. A light movement off to his right. Something which reflected the changing colors of the room-light in a different way—something black, yes, but a different kind of black. It was moving fast, close to the floor—

It was a black cat.

The time had come.

Cam quickly shook his head to clear it. He tensed his muscles, waiting for the freedom he knew was coming. The cat would come to him, he was sure, then there would be a pause as the cat's eyes would focus upon him and burn free the invisible bonds which held—

But no, she wasn't heading toward him—not toward him at all!

Ktaral! His mind focused into that one word, that one name—attempting to transmit to her the sense of urgency he felt, the need for her to concentrate her powers—

Of course! She had no powers in this room. Not while that symbol was there on that cross. She was as powerless as her Master with that thing there. Here, right here and now in this room, the black cat was just that. Nothing more than a black cat! Not until that symbol—

But how—?

And then he saw how. It should have been obvious to him before. But to do him credit, it became obvious the instant the four-footed black creature left the floor and shot upward—directly

toward the shelf containing the dolls. He knew instantly which one she would be after, and what she would do when she had located it.

A cat, after all—even a cat with no powers other than its own catlike powers—does have teeth.

Sharp teeth.

Which, in this particular cat's case, went to work immediately.

Cam quickly turned his attention back to the front of the room. The dance still went on, the chanting was reaching a deafening pitch. Good. He'd soon be able to—

His arms' pressure against the unseen bonds was so great as to bring his elbows up to ear level when the release came. Swiftly he thrust them back to his sides. Arms and hands could do little until his ankles . . . no, they still were bound. He shot a glance toward the shelf.

Two green ovals shone back at him. They seemed to nod. He tested his ankles again. The right foot moved easily away from the left. He was free!

Again he looked at the green eyes. But there was no mental message, only the steady blaze of green. There could be no message from her—nothing. Not until—

"Dam-bal-lah! Dam-bal—"

Precisely four of them broke off their chant at the same syllable as the naked body of lighter skin crashed through them, fullback-style, as if they were nothing but kindling wood. Two heads directly in his path turned slowly—perhaps to see what was the cause of their fellow chanters' sud-

den silence. Neither of them made the complete turn. One, a woman, caught the direct force of an elbow swing that unhinged her jaw from its moorings. The second, a man, was the recipient of five nose-crushing knuckles which sent him backward, arms flailing, as an effective blocker for the charging Puerto Rican. Before Daddy Bones realized what was happening, Cam was three quarters of the way toward the big wooden cross. Before he'd opened his mouth, he was all the way there, his mighty hands grasping the bottom part of the shank with a vengeance.

"Stop him!" the *houngan* cried.

"Forgive me, Lord!" Cam whispered toward the ceiling—although he believed the Count when he'd said, long ago, that the Cross was more than merely Christian symbolism. ("The sign is far older than such as you can appreciate. Its origins . . ." but he had not completed the statement). Still, the symbol was to Cam what it was to millions of humans. Thus he asked for forgiveness.

Then he ripped it from its anchoring stand and, his arm and shoulder muscles straining, raised it high above his head.

"Stop him! Stop him, you fools!"

The front ranks of the worshipers, to their credit, tried. As they closed in, Cam took one swift step backward and allowed the top part of the cross to drop to his right. Then, like the Paul Bunyan of North American folklore, he brought it around in a sweeping arc which, if the great wooden cross had been an ax, would have felled the biggest sequoia in Californian history. Though

not an ax, it did appreciably well. When the implement had completed its circuit, there were at least fifteen would-be attackers down. Cam guessed that at least half of them would never be getting up again—never.

He tried to turn his wrists upward so as to get about the real business of the moment, but the momentum he'd established was too much. Which was in fact a lucky thing. As he at first reluctantly followed the weighty cross around to complete the horizontal circle it had begun, he saw flashes of steel—long thin flashes, dangerously close.

And now, as the wooden beams went thudding into shanks and trunks in its path, Cam for the first time began to hear the screams of pain in its wake—as well as the liquid sounds of arteries and veins and the snapping cracks of bones. Writhing himself in a glory not all that different from the black girl who had the spirit of the insatiable voodoo Venus within her, Cam took another complete turn with his mighty weapon, his ears delighting in the broken but steady symphony of pain he was orchestrating.

For God's sake, Sanchez—stop!

His frenzied eyes, full of self-righteous rage, suddenly cleared. He saw before him—far before him, it seemed—that pair of green eyes. Yes, Ktara was right. But—

It couldn't have been Ktara. She could *not* have spoken to him—not audibly, not through telepathy! She was, here and now, nothing more than a cat—*nothing* more. Her Master, then?

No. Not while the cross . . .

It had, then, to be himself—his own mind telling him to stop the nonsense and get on with the real task. *Yes!*

With a cry that would have done six karate experts credit if they had been attacking in unison, Cam emptied his lungs. At the same time, a surge of power pulsed through his arms, his grip becoming a steel vise which shot upward, throwing the top part of the cross high above his head. Inhaling to full capacity, the bullet-headed giant shouted again.

And brought the wooden implement down—straight down to the floor.

The crash was composed of one gigantic *crack* and a chorus of lesser rip-rending sounds as, from the point of contact, a shower of splinters from tiny to larger than fist-size geysered upward and then rained down upon awe-struck cult members in far parts of the room.

There was a silence in the immediate aftermath. Then there was the command of Daddy Bones:

“Take him!”

The first man who stepped forward took the jagged end of the two-foot-long beam Cam still held—square in the face. Falling to the floor with a howl, his hands busy trying to stop his blood from flowing from the several unnatural openings, he managed to block attack from that quarter for almost a full five seconds. But even in that interim, the Puerto Rican had thrust and clubbed to such effectiveness that the weapon was covered almost

completely with the blood of those who'd dared to get too close.

Jerking his head and body completely around in a circle, he saw that there was now a respectful distance between himself and the nearest black man. Their eyes, while watching him, also were looking at each other—waiting for someone else to make the move.

A hissing sound from the rear of the room caught his attention. An old woman had tried to make it to the shelf which held the dolls—his own included. But she hadn't made it. She stood trembling, unwilling to move an inch closer to the black animal which was perched on the shelf, its cruel green eyes as menacing as its bared claws and fangs.

Daddy Bones, too, had noticed the same scene, but now returned his attention to Cam. "I said—*Get him! Eli!*"

It was now that the cluster of blacks between Cam and the altar parted. In the parting, he could see the glassy-eyed Euleila as the head of the snake moved up and around her hair, its lower body coiled around her face and neck. But he didn't look at her for long. Into the breach formed by the parting cultists moved the big Eli—and two of his muscular friends.

There was no fear in any of their eyes as they rushed him, only a sense of purpose. Their faces were set with determination as they charged. Cam's teeth clenched as he drove his bloody beam-end forward. Eli laughed as he dodged under it. Then his eyes grew round as Cam returned

his laugh. The thrust had been a feint. The knife-edge of his bare left foot was not. It caught the manservant square in the right temple. He went down in a collapsing motion, Cam not knowing whether he was alive or dead and not caring much. He had other things to keep his mind busy.

The two behind Eli rushed on parallel lines, both equidistant from the naked Puerto Rican. Still grinning, Cam waited until they were close enough. Then—

“*Catch!*” he yelled and, cocking back his right arm, swiftly jerked it forward, throwing the thing he had in his hand like a target knife.

The jagged end of the two-foot beam caught the man on the left precisely on target—right in the open O of his gaping mouth. Cam’s peripheral vision registered the freshly blooded splinters protruding from the back of the man’s head as he crashed to the floor, but his main focus was on the third man. The focus of his eyes—and of his upward-sweeping right backhand, which caught the black directly under the nose. The slight cracking sound was nothing compared to the noises which had been crashing through the underground room, but it was enough to bring a smile to Cam’s lips. It was a grisly smile, but one which was accompanied by his hands relaxing. This one he knew was dead—the brief impact had sent splintered bone deep into the attacker’s brain.

Immediately, the hands again snapped up. Cam hadn’t heard exactly what it was the *houngan* had said, but he now saw the result. The four

“walkers”—their heads had risen from where their chins had rested upon their chests, their shoulders were no longer rounded but straight, and their feet were no longer rooted in front of the altar. The feet were moving—in a shuffling kind of movement, yes, but moving.

The direction Eli and his two friends had moved.

Right toward him.

And to his right, he heard Daddy Bones laugh.

“Okay, Mr. Tough Man—you see how well you do *now!*”

Cam set his teeth and took a quick step backward. Pausing for but an instant—enough time to adjust his weight where he wanted it—he pushed off. His high-pitched yell did nothing to move the first of the white-eyed creatures. But, what was worse—far worse—was the fact that neither did the more substantive *thuds* of both of Cam’s feet, one of which impacted on the thing’s forehead, the other on its chest.

Snapping back to a standing position, Cam saw that the total damage—or, rather, the total *inconvenience*—his attack had had could be summed up in one word:

Zero.

The obvious thought flashed through his mind: Cameron, my lad, I think you’re in trouble.

As the lead *zombie* began a horizontal swing of its thick arm, he answered his own observation: *Trouble*—that might just be a slight bit of understatement.

Right! the reply came—simultaneous with the collision of the sweeping black arm with Cam's two vertical forearms, thrust up in what the books call "an effective counter to a horizontal fist or blade attack."

Excelente, Señors! Cam mentally told the writers of the books. *Except, of course, when the horizontal attack, she is launched by an opponent constructed of solid rock!*

Frivolous or not, such were the Puerto Rican's thoughts as the impact resulted in his hurtling knees-over-nose the some fifteen feet which brought his back into painful contact with the side wall. Shaking his head to clear it from the flashing lights which had nothing to do with the *houngan's* mechanical device above the altar, he prepared himself for the next round. Except that he resigned himself to the fact that this was not to be an overly aggressive round on his part. No, the idea was to avoid.

Avoid. Beautiful! There were, after all, four of them.

And, in their own shuffling way, they were coming for him now.

Again, in his peripheral vision, he caught Daddy Bones' laughing face and the expectant faces of the members of his congregation—those who were not at present more concerned with beating a fast path out of the way of the walkers' advance. Also he could see the far wall to his left where the black cat still stood guard over the dolls on the shelf. *Stood guard?* Wasn't there something just a bit more constructive that she

could do? She had the power to freeze the movement of lesser creatures, that he knew—and she had left him in no doubt that she considered just about every creature on earth her inferior. Except, of course, for one. Speaking of whom, where in hell was *he*? Nightfall had long passed—or so the *houngan* had said.

Speaking of whom—

“What is that? Who told you to do *that*?”

The eyes of Daddy Bones had turned to his drummers. Cam had not noticed it previously, his attention being rather taken by the four who even now were but fifteen feet from his back-to-the-wall position, but the drums had begun to beat out a rhythm under the slapping palms of the men who sat over them. Strange, their faces looked—well, frightened. It was as if their hands were moving somehow *independent* of their wills.

Daddy Bones did not look all that calm, either. “You hear me? I ask you something—who told you to do that? What *mean* them drums?”

And, even as his final question echoed through the room, the drums stopped, and there was complete silence.

For no more than three of Cam’s heartbeats. Then, from the open doorway to the right of the altar, the question was answered.

“Of old, they are mine,” Count Dracula said.

CHAPTER 11

"Owenga! Owenga!"

The cry went up, but Daddy Bones countered it with an ear-piercing scream:

"No! There ain't no owenga!" His face now seemed a crazed labyrinth of running serpents. He whipped his eyes around to Cam—no, not to Cam, but to the four zombies who still moved toward their given objective.

"You who are dead and walk! You hear me now! There is one here who comes unbidden to our ritual—turn, turn and take him!"

Cam exhaled slowly as they did as they were bidden. Halting less than ten feet from where he stood, they shuffled about in a turn. The members of the congregation who had circled in back of the walkers now scurried out of their way.

Count Dracula smiled. His expression was one of mild amusement as his eyes sought out Daddy Bones.

"So, houngan. You unleash against me the living dead! These four are those whom your magic has made as they are—your powers! You think yourself a superior being because you have the ability to make such as these?"

Daddy Bones sneered his answer. "They are dead, yet they live. I have created life!"

"Life! It was there, beating in those breasts, before you touched them. No, you did not *create* life, *houngan*—you merely extended it over a longer period than normal. A truly pitiful accomplishment, when the final product is considered. The search for eternal life is as old as intelligence, but life such as your powers have sustained is an abomination."

"*You lie!*"

The Count's eyebrows raised. "Do I? If I lie, how is it you have not given to yourself this boon of eternity? Why is it you are not one of those whom you call *zombie*? A pitiful name for a piteous creature."

Daddy Bones' lips drew back in rage. "You will see just how pitiful they are! You gonna see right now!"

Dracula looked for an instant at the four creatures moving toward him, then he returned his gaze to Daddy Bones. Other than the shuffling feet of the four, there was no sound as the Count smiled haughtily at the *houngan*, then bowed slightly. Without a word, he straightened and faced toward the first of the four whose expressionless white eyeballs were fixed upon the place where he stood.

Slowly the lead zombie's great arms lifted, his huge hands extended toward the Count. As if to emphasize his completely untroubled state, the intruder brought both of his own hands to his head, his fingers moving gently, flat back along his hair,

smoothing it down, making sure there was no hair out of place.

Daddy Bones laughed. "See—see the white man's vanity! That vanity gonna be the death of him!" Again the *houngan* laughed. But Cam was watching the black man's eyes. There was no laughter in them, none at all. It was difficult to tell, but it looked as if the beginnings of fear were starting to take root behind the chief priest's eyeballs. *The intruder was still smiling!*

And yet, notwithstanding that smile, he was moving *away* from the first of his attackers!

But only for an instant.

By the time the entire thing could register on anyone's mind, it was all over. The intruder had stepped quickly to one side of the blank-eyed black man. As the extended hands moved around in pursuit, the black-dressed stranger swung his left arm around like a tennis player's backhand, except that the movement had none of the tennis player's obvious power behind it. The motion did not look at all strained—the power had to be there, based on the observable aftermath.

In the winking of an eye, the movement began, connected with the turning breastbone of the zombie—and lifted the creature up and back with a speed that would have defied detection, had not the motion of the figure stopped abruptly as spine met altar edge with a crack which sounded through the room like the shot of a high-caliber rifle. Its back bent over the altar so that shoulder blades touched the surface, the zombie's knees

buckled and dropped to the floor, drag-rolling the top part of its body with it.

But no sooner had astonishment from that scene registered than another followed to take its place. The intruder had thrust out his right hand to meet his next closest attacker and had clasped his fingers about the zombie's neck. There appeared to be no effort exerted, there was no sharp-sounding crack, but the result was there for all eyes to see. First, the head seemed to roll upon the black creature's shoulders, as if the neck which had held it had been reduced to jelly. Then the body below the neck simply crumpled to the floor, taking neck and head along with it.

The intruder in formal dress still appeared completely unruffled, still wore the amused smile upon his face, as he stepped into the wake of the last two of the walking dead. But now, as if in complete disregard of possible danger, he clasped his hands behind him—as their hands rose and moved in for the kill.

It was brief, only an instant, but some of the watchers caught it: the bright white centers in the dark red eyes of the intruder. Even so, even among those who had caught the change in the white man's visage, all attention was quickly engaged by the two zombies who suddenly—unaccountably—*burst into flames!*

As suddenly as it had burst, the flame died. All that remained of the two living-dead men was the after-image in the eyes of the viewers. That was all. There was nothing—no ash, no charred bones—nothing.

Count Dracula's smile faded from his face.

"I tire of this play-acting. The hour is growing late, and there are things I must do."

"W-what th-things?"

The question came from Daddy Bones. Somehow, Cam saw with satisfaction, the *houngan* no longer looked his old confident self.

The Count answered the question directly.

"*First*—first, I must satisfy my own requirements. I hunger. For my sustenance—"

He stopped. His eyes had been scanning the basement room, but they stopped when they reached the altar—and the naked girl standing spread-legged upon it.

"You are Euleila," the vampire said. "I wish you to come to me. Now."

The girl looked at the man below her, then back into the eyes of that snake whose pupils gazed deeply into her own. Her face was fashioned into a mask of pure terror.

"I—I—"

"You *can*, Euleila. You *can* step down from there. Your slithering friend will not harm you. I shall see to that. My powers are such as to see to that. Do you believe me?"

"I—yes, I . . ."

"You *what*?"

"I believe you—*Master*."

The last word could well have been a cannon shot, based on its effects—on the congregation as a whole, but especially upon one of those present.

"*Master?*" Daddy Bones screamed. "I am your master!"

"That is an interesting proposition, *houngan*," the Count replied. "One which requires a demonstration, I think. Yes." He turned to the girl. "Come down. *Now*."

Her eyes still on those of the snake, the girl lowered the top half of her body until her buttocks rested upon the altar. Then, lowering her legs over the side, she extended them until she felt her feet touch the floor. The snake still entwined around on her body, she straightened and took the five steps necessary to reach the intruder's side.

"The serpent," Count Dracula said. "It is wrapped too tightly about your neck. Loosen it."

"I would like to, Master, but he won't—"

"He will. You will see. Just do as I say."

A slight smile on the girl's lips, she raised her arms, her fingers wrapping around that part of the creature which was closest to the front of her throat. "I—"

"Do not be afraid, Euleila. Not of the snake."

"Yes, Master," she said, trancelike.

Her hands pushed outward. The snake moved almost voluntarily.

Count Dracula laughed. "Now, child, come to me."

She did, willingly.

The Count looked deeply into her eyes. "I have admired you—you who call yourself Euleila. So much so that I think—yes, I think that I shall bestow upon you a very special boon."

He snapped his face up toward where Daddy Bones stood.

"You! You think you know of eternal life—you think you know the secret of bestowing it upon others! Well, watch—watch very carefully, you who dabble in the black arts. Watch and see the process by which the granting of immortality is accomplished!"

"No!"

Cam Sanchez's own cry reverberated through his brain.

"No!" he repeated. "You can't—"

But the vampire's stare cut him off.

"I, Mr. Sanchez—I can do anything and everything I please, as long as I fulfill the terms of my agreement with your employer. That agreement covers, perhaps, *whose* blood I shall take—but it says nothing regarding *how* I take it. Reflect and remember."

And in a sudden flash of memory, Cam did remember. . . .

It was on the eve of that first time Harmon had loosed his "new weapon" upon those he considered deserving of it. He had been worried about the effect upon those he had designated as victims, but Dracula had discerned the source of the professor's uneasiness:

"You are concerned lest my victims become as myself. You need not be troubled. As I have mentioned to you, many of the stories about me are not based upon fact. Legend has its usefulness on occasion, but—"

Harmon had interrupted. "Then the victims of vampires do not themselves become vampires?"

The Count had paused. First he had objected

to the term *vampire*, then he had directed himself to the specific question.

"The bite of one such as I does not grant the victim immortality."

That part of it Cam and Harmon both had reason to know was true. Since it had been stated, there had been several victims of the Count's "bite." But there had been more to the statement—

"Unless, of course, I *wish* it to do so. It takes a conscious act on my part, and I am most selective as to whom I grant this boon."

Selective. And now it looked as if he had made his selection.

"No!" Cam shouted again. "You *can't* do it!"

The Count's eyebrows rose questioningly.

"Can't? *Can't*, Mr. Sanchez? I suggest you watch me."

"Do not try to move, Sanchez," the Count warned. "You shall stay as you are, where you are, until I have finished. I trust you have no objection?"

Cam's answer was on his tongue. The problem was, he could not open his mouth to deliver it. He was paralyzed! Again, he had been deceived into thinking of the vampire as an ally when such was not the case, could never be the case. Harmon had a hold on the fiend, yes, but the hold did not extend to all things. There were limits to what could be expected. He had had evidence of that before—from the Count and from Ktara.

Ktara. Yes. There she was, still in her cat form,

standing at the alert on the shelf which held the voodoo dolls.

"No objection, Mr. Sanchez?" The white-centered eyes turned next to the *houngan*. "And you—do I hear your voice raised to deny me what I wish?"

"I—" But that was all the *houngan* said. It was all he *could* say. He took one step forward, his fibrous musculature a picture of protest, but one step was all he took. No more. His body was frozen, even if his eyes were not.

As for his followers, they hardly dared to breathe, let alone move. Their eyes switched from the frozen Daddy Bones to the intruder and back again. Finally, they rested upon the white man in the formal evening clothes. His own attention, however, seemed to be focused only upon the girl who now stood directly in front of him.

"And now, my dear . . ."

The Count opened his mouth and inclined his head downward to Euleila's waiting throat.

"*Owenga!*" somebody whispered. "*Owenga!*"

The word was repeated once or twice, in almost silent gasps. Such was the intensity of the silence in this underground room with the ever-changing colored lights that it seemed to have a substance of its own which enveloped the bodies and very souls of all those present, turning them into beings of complete passivity. None could do anything more than watch.

Cam had expected to see the vampire's transformation from the suave aristocrat into the full-fanged animal, but that did not happen. No, the

Count's face, and indeed his entire bearing, remained that of the nobleman. The nobleman as vampire lover, taking the life essence from the black Venus whose body was still entwined with forty inches of snake—a creature which, like all the others in *the* presence, moved neither head nor lower body.

How long it took, there was no way of knowing, but at length it was over, the Count straightening his head and stepping away from the naked black girl, and she herself straightening and turning toward the center of the room. It now seemed that the vampire was whispering softly to the girl, but words could not be distinguished. Communication of some type was taking place, though. The girl nodded once, then again, signifying that she understood. Then, her eyes scanning the room, she smiled.

The smile itself was terrible to behold, but the act of smiling involved the pulling back of her lips over the girl's teeth. There was no doubt about it. The teeth were those of the vampire!

"Behold, *houngan!*" Count Dracula said dramatically. "Behold *my* creation!"

The Count's hands were spread as if he were exhibiting a prize-winning sculpture. "She is beautiful, is she not? Ah, but she has been drained of a great deal of her life. She requires replenishment. So, benevolent creator that I am, I give my creation her choice of delicacies. Euleila, my creature, look about you. Any one of them—any—merely select whom you wish, for whatever reason you wish, and that one's blood is yours.

Come now, there is no reason for you to be timid! You have the power of Dracula in your veins. What you want you take. So take, my child—take.”

Again the girl's eyes scanned the room until they made contact with another pair. Then they stopped. Again the girl smiled her terrible smile, looking to her Master for confirmation.

The Count nodded, his expression one of delighted approval.

The girl stepped forward, her eyes fixed upon those of her intended victim.

Cam.

The girl's lengthened teeth were less than five inches from Cam's throat when the Count inclined his head to the right side as if he were listening to something far off in space. He was.

“A moment, my dear,” he said with a smile. “It appears that Mr. Sanchez's employer takes exception to your choice, just as he registered more than a mild complaint regarding your transformation.” His face and voice hardened. “He should know by now, of course, that I am a man of my word. He has held me to it for some time now.”

His verbalization of thoughts was obviously for the benefit of the professor who Cam did not doubt was going through sheer hell listening to the taunting vampire. But the professor's problems were, for the moment, the professor's. Cam had his own problems. The reeking breath of the creature which had been Euleila was already flowing upward into his nostrils. It was with diffi-

culty that he wrenched his eyes from her face to that of the Count.

"He should *know*," the vampire was saying, "that once my word is given, I do not break it." And now his tone softened. "I could, I suppose, strike a bargain with the good professor. I could offer to let his faithful employee go free in exchange for his dissolution of our agreement. I *could* do that. But I shall not. I have given my new creation her choice, and she has made it."

And now, as his eyes once again rested upon Euleila, he smiled. "But there is no hurry, my child. A meal such as you are about to enjoy should not be rushed. Delay builds one's anticipation, which in turn increases the savoring, especially when it is one's first such feast. You shall wait—until I have completed the other business which has brought me to this place."

The black girl took one step back from Cam, her face showing mild disappointment, but also the enjoyment of his predicament. The Puerto Rican again shook his gaze free from hers, his eyes following the Count as he made his way past the *houngan* without so much as a sidelong glance. He stopped before Jenny.

She was fortunate in one way. She still was unconscious. If she were not, and were now gazing into the terrible face of the man she knew as Count Yula . . .

Without any noticeable effort, the Count snapped the manacles which held her and eased her to a seated position on the floor. Then he

turned to the shelf which held the dolls—and the animal which protected them.

The green eyes of the black cat flashed.

“Ah! You are angry with me, my longtime friend? Or is it not anger, but something else? A pang of jealousy, perhaps? Or is it merely concern for our Mr. Sanchez? If so, why do you not rush to assist him?”

He looked from the cat to something on the floor and bent over gracefully to pick it up. “I see! How unfortunate that, in destroying that great cross, Mr. Sanchez did not make certain that the *other* symbol was obliterated.”

He turned to extend the block of wood to Cam. The double-snake-and-wand sign was intact.

“Very careless, very,” Count Dracula said, again bending down and replacing the piece of wood—precisely the way it had been, face up. “I wish I could be of some assistance,” he said mockingly. “Yet this particular task was not given to me, but to another. No one can hold me responsible for the incompetence of someone else—is *that not true, Professor Harmon?*”

Abruptly he reached out and grasped the black doll which had been Euleila’s. Turning back toward the center of the room, he held it up so that it could be seen by all.

“This figure is now powerless—watch!”

They watched—all of them—as he mangled the doll until it was no longer recognizable as anything but a lump of clay. Euleila was in no way disturbed, physically or mentally, although no one seemed to notice. The intruder—the *owenga*—

was doing something else to the clay, refashioning it. And then—

Daddy Bones screamed with horror.

“Yes,” the Count said with a smile. “It now is *you, houngan!* But that little morsel of pain was nothing—compared to what is coming!”

“No—please don’t do that! I—”

“You are *pleading, houngan?* So strange to hear pleading from the lips of one such as yourself, such a one with such great *power. . . .*”

The shriek was one of pure agony.

“Do you see, *houngan*, how little power you really have? Allow me to illustrate further.” He replaced the doll upon the shelf. “No, I do not need such an implement, my friend. It has occurred to me that you claim influence over the animate as well as the inanimate world. Especially it is part of your ritual to control the feeble minds of such as that—the serpent. See now just how extensive that control really is!”

The Count pointed a finger, his eyes narrowing for a moment. The snake began to move. Downward along Euleila’s naked body, down along the leg it had climbed, down to the floor where it began its wriggling movement—straight toward Daddy Bones.

The *houngan* was now a mass of trembling, the sweat pouring from his body and between the pulsating, rippling sinews which lined his face. He opened his mouth to scream, to beg, but nothing came.

“You may speak if you wish, *houngan*,” the

Count said. "I have released my control over your mind and your body. Try, *houngan—try!*"

And now, with a wail, the man did try—he tried to move from the path of the snake. First he ran to his left, but he was confronted by a wall. A wall of his own people.

"Help me!" he pleaded, but they acted as if he were not there. Their eyes were averted from this man who had been their leader, this man who had been the respected voodoo chief.

"Please—help me!" he cried, now running further in the same direction, directly to the black-draped altar. "You *must* help me—I *command* it!"

Someone laughed, then someone else. Then the entire room seemed full of sounds of jeering.

And the big snake moved ever closer.

Frantically, Daddy Bones reached out and grasped a tall black man by the shoulder. "You—I always done good by you! Help me, I command you. *I beg you!*"

With an upward heave of his shoulder, the big man threw off the *houngan's* hands. At the same time, a woman who stood next to the man pushed her arms outward, her hands catching Daddy Bones in the chest and sending him away from her. His eyes whipping around to where the snake had progressed, the *houngan* retraced his steps the way he had come.

"Don't you come near me!" an old man shouted.

"Nor me, neither!" came another warning. And again hands were raised to thrust the cult leader away from where he had halted.

“Go ’way from me.”

“You nothing no more! Don’t you come no closer!”

Daddy Bones screamed. “You *got* to help me! If *you* don’t help me, who gonna?”

“You help you’self, big *houngan*!” an old woman cried with glee. Cam saw that it was the old one who had assisted him with the dolls, the one who had held the key to this room.

Daddy Bones had turned to face her, but what he might have said would never be known. With a soul-rending shriek, he jerked his head down to his own right leg.

The snake had made its initial contact and had already coiled once around the man’s calf.

The voice of Dracula sounded a warning:

“Don’t move, *houngan*. Don’t move a muscle or else you might frighten your serpentine friend. If he should become frightened, that venemous fang of his just might sink itself into your thigh. You’ve seen what happens to people then, haven’t you? Yes, I believe you have. It is not an especially nice way to die.”

“P-please ...” He seemed capable of only a whimper now.

“Yes, the hour is late.” The vampire took three steps forward, then seemed to remember something. He turned toward Cam.

And Euleila.

“You have been very patient, my dear. It is, I think, time for you to gratify your yearnings. Have you chosen your menu?”

He laughed as the black girl's eyes burned closer to Cam's.

"An excellent choice. He possesses a healthy body, and I imagine his blood is very rich. And you have your reasons for wanting him dead, have you not? If it were not for him, you would not have been humiliated and tortured before all your people. But think. Perhaps you have chosen hastily. Perhaps . . . perhaps there is someone else here whom you owe even more bitterness . . . for what *he* did to you. And, look—look how the very same serpent who held you captive now squeezes that man's middle, almost as if the snake were assisting you by pushing your meal upward where it will be easier for you to—"

"No—*noooooo!*" Daddy Bones moaned.

Dracula did not bother to answer. Euleila's turned face was answer enough. She took one more look at Cam, then moved away from him.

"No," Daddy Bones pleaded. "Not that—not *that!*"

But she was before him now, and he could see those blood-red eyes, those sharp white teeth, and feel the hot breath upon his knotted face.

"Please," he whimpered. "Let the snake bite me—let it happen that way!"

The Count shook his head. "My personal regrets, *houngan*, but I have given my word. Your torture victim has made her choice."

Daddy Bones screamed just once more as, simultaneously, the coils of the coral snake tightened around his stomach and Euleila's teeth sliced through his throat.

Count Dracula turned to Cam and smiled.

"I suggest you take your leave now. Take Harmon's niece with you. There is also another task for you to perform—if you can."

His eyes turned toward the place above the altar where the colored lights emanated. There was an instant's concentration. Then Cam saw the flames.

"Quickly, Mr. Sanchez."

Energy surged into Cam's body. He moved toward the Count.

"And you—what about you?"

"I?" the vampire asked. "I have further things to do. I now have an additional responsibility to discharge."

Cam followed his eyes to where, in the flickering light, the black girl was feeding.

CHAPTER 12

The dark streets outside the house were empty, except for the woman dressed in black. She extended something to Cam.

"A pair of trousers. I've got a large shirt for the girl."

As Ktara draped the shirt around the still-unconscious Jenny, Cam quickly stepped into the pants which were both baggy and filthy—but this

was hardly a time to be fastidious. When he reached the end of the street, he was surprised to find the battered Chevy still there and even more surprised that the key was still in the ignition.

Ktara said quietly, "Out here my powers were not affected."

Cam was about to mutter something, but a sudden flash of light behind him made him turn. The flames had reached the outside of the shack at the other end of the street.

"They'll *all* die in the fire?"

She knew what he meant. "No. Not all."

He pushed the button of the glove compartment. The .357 Magnum was where he'd left it.

"That won't help."

Cam turned the ignition key. As the old car sprang to life, he nodded to Ktara.

"You know, then, what my Master meant?"

"The additional task?" Cam's eyes narrowed. "I know. I heard the number clear as a bell."

"The pen. Pick it up and write."

Damien Harmon looked at the pen and his checkbook, both of which lay on the oilcloth-covered table in the cottage. Then he looked at the man seated across the room—and the pistol in the man's hand.

"The check," Atwood Garth said. "Fill it out."

"For the full amount?" Harmon asked. There was venom in his voice. "For the full five hundred thousand or for the fifty thousand your voodoo accomplice asked?"

Garth smiled. "The larger figure, if you please."

It was very unfortunate that our Daddy Bones mentioned an amount at all. My idea was for everyone to walk out of this thing with what they valued. My deepest of apologies, Damien, that this now cannot be so. A pity that your ambulatory abilities are not such that you could have put your plot-unravelling information to better use."

Also a pity, Harmon thought to himself, that he hadn't resisted the urge to confront his "friend" with the knowledge. He had been very stupid, and he knew it. He could have gotten the drop on Garth easily—clipped to the bottomside of the wheelchair right now was the small .38 which would have been quite effective. But, no—his concern had been directed toward what the Count had done to Euleila. And, of course, for Cam and Jennifer. Now the communication unit was silent, but he'd heard enough to know that they were safe—and, he hoped coming this way at top speed.

Nonetheless, he had been stupid. He could at least have waited until he had *his* gun in hand before shouting accusations at Garth who, arriving only moments ago and having no knowledge of what had taken place, had kept up the guise of the concerned friend. Certainly the professor had been rattled, but that was no excuse. There *never* was an excuse for stupidity!

"The pen, Damien."

"And then, after I sign?"

Garth genuinely looked sorry. "Then I will have to kill you. I'll try to make it look like a voodoo thing—or better yet, suicide. Yes, it will be something the authorities will understand. Poor Da-

mien Harmon shot himself in order to escape the excruciating pain which was being magically inflicted upon him. Such things are not unknown on this island, Damien. And, after all, I should know. I was suffering from a bit of an attack myself."

"Which was very clever."

"I thought so."

You wouldn't have, though—not if that metal shield around your brain hadn't blocked off your brain waves!

Harmon's jaws were clenched. "And after I am dead?"

"After the tragedy, I don't doubt that your friends will wish to investigate, but they'll have little luck. Daddy Bones will have his share of the enterprise with him in hiding on the southern end of the island. I doubt if anyone will be able to pick up his initial traces."

You're right about that, friend.

"As for Jennifer, don't worry. She won't be harmed any more than she has been. You know, I rather like the girl, Damien. It was just that she presented such a fine opportunity—a *golden* opportunity, if I may be excused the allusion to the wealth she is bringing me. She wanted to study voodoo. The very first day, my servants came to me with their complaints—and their warnings. It was the last which gave me the idea."

He sighed. "Things have not gone all that well for me, Damien. My situation financially is much worse than appearances might indicate. I have never been what one might call a thrifty person. My tastes are much more expensive than my

means. Thus. . . . Well, it was not difficult to convince Daddy Bones that my idea might have merit. Fifty thousand dollars is, of course, much more money than a man like him can contemplate. As for myself, that amount is piddling—especially when one considers what you easily can afford. Oh yes, I’ve already talked to my banker about the whole thing. Sorry I failed to follow out your instructions in that respect.”

The pistol hammer clicked back. “Now—we have wasted enough time.”

Harmon forced an unconcerned smile to his lips. “Before you do anything singularly rash, I think it only gentlemanly of me to tell you some things.”

“Make it very fast, Damien.”

“I shall. First, your good friend Daddy Bones is dead.”

“Indeed?” Garth smiled. “And just who is supposed to have accomplished this? Certainly not your young associate. Mr. Sanchez, as you may or may not know, is now a helpless prisoner.”

“That intelligence is a bit out of date, Garth. But no, it was not Cam. I’d like you to take a look inside that box. That one—that long crate. The top is unlocked. I’d like you to look inside.”

“Is this some sort of trick, Damien?”

Harmon spread his hands. “Would I attempt to trick someone as intelligent as yourself?”

But even as Garth’s left hand descended to the top of the crate, his right hand kept the cocked pistol directed toward Harmon’s breastbone. It was, in a way, a good thing that Garth was not

particularly nervous at the moment. A quick contraction of his index finger would surely have meant death to the professor. Instead, when the sound from outside met their ears, Garth merely nodded.

It was a shot.

It was followed by more of the same.

“Where—where—”

“It’s almost over,” Cam told Jenny. “Look after her,” he told Ktara as, with a roll-dive, he left the car. As he did so he fired two rapid shots in the general direction of the one which had ricocheted off the hood of the Chevy. The guards protecting the road—Ktara said there were four of them—had now been notified that the assault vehicle was no longer their target, but that instead there was somebody with a big-caliber gun outside in the darkness with them. They would be very careful about when and at what they fired now, for fear of presenting the big gun with a target to aim at.

Flat on his stomach, Cam waited for some kind of movement, any kind. He did not expect the movement which came.

In the darkness of the brush before him were four pinpoints of yellow light. They lasted only a moment. When the lights were extinguished, four men stepped into the clearing and stopped, their weapons pointed downward at their sides.

From behind Cam, Ktara said, “It is simpler this way.”

Standing, Cam looked back at the car. “Jenny—”

“She is in a mild trance. She must stay that way

until all of this is over and done with. First, we must deal with these four.” Her eyes narrowed, their hue changing from bright green to yellow.

The four walked mechanically toward the man and woman, stopping before Ktara. Their eyes were glazed, their mouths open.

Ktara said nothing. She simply looked at the four, one by one, her eyes blazing. Then she stepped to one side.

The four began to walk down the roadway.

“You’re letting them—”

“Go?” Ktara asked. “In a sense, yes. They will go as far as they can—in that direction.”

Cam looked beyond the four men. There was a ramshackle bath house. Beyond that there was nothing. Nothing except the beach and the waves which lapped lazily onto it.

“They’ll *really*—”

Ktara smiled. “They have no choice. They will walk as far as they can, then they will swim as far as they can. Eventually . . . well, even the most programmed machine eventually runs down.” She looked at Cam’s face. “You do not like this way of doing things, do you, Mr. Sanchez?”

“I didn’t say that.” But, of course, he didn’t have to say it. The thought was in his mind, that was enough. “It’s just that, somehow, it doesn’t seem—”

“It doesn’t seem *right*,” she completed. “It’s more *right* to dispose of undesirable human beings *your* way.” Her eyes flickered at Cam’s pistol.

Cam looked from her to the four figures which

even now were approaching the growth of bush which outlined the beach. Then he looked up the roadway.

"About what's right and what isn't, I guess I'm not sure. But one thing I know. There's another *undesirable human* to be disposed of, and I'm not going to be all that choosy about how it happens."

"The car," Ktara said. "We will take the car up to the main house."

"For Garth?"

"No. Garth is with the professor. At the cottage. We're taking Jennifer to the house. I want to be sure she is made comfortable—in a place she can't be disturbed. Then you and I can get on to the next order of business."

"But the professor—and Garth!"

She nodded. "They are at the cottage. But, as you said yourself, you do not care how it happens."

Her eyes now were pointed upward. He followed them. It did not take him long to spot it—the large flying creature moving on a line directly toward the cottage.

Almost immediately, the drums began.

"I've had just about enough of your nonsense, Damien."

"But the crate, Garth—doesn't it even mildly prick your curiosity?"

"A crate lined with satin and containing damp earth? Yes, I'm curious, but not so curious that I'm about to be tricked into allowing you to live one more moment than is absolutely necessary."

Face it, Damien, there is no help on the way. I've got four men down there, and there were only three shots. Three rapidly fired shots, then nothing. Doesn't that suggest something to you?"

It had suggested something to Harmon, but his conclusion had been quite different from Garth's. But then Garth could not be expected to recognize the distinctive sound of Cam's Magnum.

But it was taking them devilishly long!

"Damien, you have five seconds to pick up that pen. Otherwise I will give the instructions which will cause the death of your niece. I would rather not give those instructions, but I will."

"How do I know she's not already dead?"

"You will have to take my word on that."

"The problem is, Garth—how do *you* know? As you said, there were *three* shots down there. That would be all it would take—Cam, Ktara and Jennifer."

"My men have orders not to harm her. Besides, she is in captivity right now."

"You said the same thing about Cam. But obviously it was somebody down there drawing your men's fire. No, Garth, I want *proof* she's alive before I sign anything."

It sounded reasonable to Harmon, even though he knew that such proof would be close to impossible for Garth to obtain—even if Jenny were in his henchmen's hands. There was no telephone in the cottage, and he doubted there would be one in the place where his niece had been held.

Obviously the same thoughts were being sifted in Garth's head.

“Impossible. The logistics are totally impossible. I have told you that all instructions, given to anyone connected with this, state explicitly that the girl is not to be harmed. You will have to accept that as being good enough. And you will have to accept it now. Your five seconds are gone. Pick up the pen, Damien, or my instructions concerning Jennifer shall be altered radically.”

Harmon scowled. The bluff had run its course. The time for diversionary tactics was over.

Garth held now the pistol in both hands. The hammer still was cocked back. “You are a stubborn man, Damien. I mentioned that to your niece once. It seems to me to be a pity that your stubbornness will be responsible for sending her to an unmarked grave before she has really had the opportunity to live much of her life.”

Harmon nodded. “All right. I’ll have to wheel myself closer to the table. Don’t let a nervous twitch of that trigger finger do you out of your financial solvency.”

Garth smiled. “Don’t do anything to cause such a twitch.”

Both of the professor’s hands were now on the wheels of his chair. Unfortunately, his right side was facing Garth, and it was only his right hand which could grip the pistol clasped under the chair in a way which might bring it out in a usable position. The odds on his making it were poor to the point of ridiculous. But he knew he was going to try.

Garth had been right. He *was* stubborn—stubborn to the point of idiocy. All he really had to do

was hold out just a little longer, to stall a bit more in signing that check. Then, if it came to it, he could try for the pistol. He did not have to try now.

But he did. A man, damn it, lives his life in a certain way and at Harmon's age it was no time for him to begin to bend principles which had been part of him for more than half a century. His death, in the long run, would amount to little. There would be very few to mourn his passing. Although, one in particular . . .

It would mean the end of Dracula. For this current cycle of his lifespan, anyway. And perhaps that was best, too. Harmon had brought to life something he thought he could handle—something he *had* handled up till now. But tonight—tonight when his ears could hear, but his will could do nothing to prevent, the creation of another such as the Count—tonight . . .

Yes.

"Are you stalling again, Damien?"

Harmon smiled grimly. *Not any longer, friend.*

His fingers gently lifted from the wheel.

And then he heard the drums.

"They seem close," Garth said, his brow furrowing.

"They *are* close," Harmon replied. His hand went back to the wheel as the door behind Garth opened quietly.

"Mr. Garth," said a rich voice, foreign in accent. "If you must fire that weapon of yours, I suggest myself as a more appropriate target."

Garth whirled.

"Who—who are—"

"I? I am—*Dracula!*"

"Dra—" Quickly, he backstepped to the opposite wall. "Don't try anything, either of you! That means you, too, Damien—I can get both of you from here. *Dracula!* Dracula, indeed! So that is what that crate with the dirt was supposed to be! You must be out of your minds, both of you, if you think you can trick me with such low-level superstitious hogwash!"

The Count laughed good-naturedly. "You have an excellent point, Mr. Garth. It is obvious to me, for one, that a person of your superior intelligence is not so easily tricked—especially by this, what you have called *hogwash*. I quite agree that it would be a waste of all of our time to attempt such trickery. Therefore, we shall proceed immediately to your death."

"*My* death?" Garth laughed nervously. "You forget—I have the gun!"

"I suggest you use it then." The Count took a step forward.

Garth fired.

The Count took a second step forward.

"I—don't believe it!"

"Obviously a trick of some kind, Mr. Garth."

Twice more the pistol spoke. Then it dropped to the floor as Garth, his disbelieving eyes focused on the three bloody bullet holes in the formal white shirt-front of the still advancing man, jammed his back against the wall as far as he could.

"No—it can't be! What are you?"

"I have told you my name. It is one you are not unfamiliar with."

"B-but that's impossible! *Damien!*"

"Impossible. Quite so," Harmon agreed.

"*Damien!*"

Harmon nodded. "Also impossible are certain kinds of facial changes—such as those you will witness if you pay very close attention to my friend the Count's features."

Garth's face paled. Something *was* happening to this impossible man's face. The hair was thickening; the eyes—*God!* And the nose and the mouth—the mouth with its lips curling back to reveal—

Garth screamed. He didn't know precisely what the words of his scream were. He knew what he wanted to say. He wanted to tell Harmon that he was sorry, that he had been wrong to do what he had done, that if they let him go, he would gladly go to prison for his crime—gladly do *anything*, if only—

"No . . . please, no. . . ."

He must have gotten something of his message across because he thought he could hear Harmon's voice. It sounded as if it were coming from far away, somewhere among all those strange, horrible drums.

"It is good you are not superstitious, Garth. Otherwise you might be frightened by all this."

God! Those teeth—they were coming closer and closer and closer and—*aaaaahhhhhnnnnnn!*

The heat—the unbearable heat! The shuddering

whimpering helplessness with which he was standing here and *taking* all this, unable to—

Taking? No, he wasn't taking anything. The other, that horrible thing whose teeth had torn open his throat—he was taking! And Garth now knew exactly what was being taken.

The drums, they seemed to pound within him—as if they matched the pumping of his own heart as it pushed his life's fluid up to his throat where it was being consumed by the other. His feet now had no feeling in them, his lower legs, his hands. *God, no! Please—anything! Anything but this!*

Somewhere, far away, there was a voice. It sounded as cold as the ice which now was gripping him deep within his stomach.

“Quite so. *Low-level superstitious hogwash!*”

CHAPTER 13

“You were about to force him to kill you, Harmon.”

The Count rose from the body of Atwood Garth, his bestial features still wet with the fresh blood of the dead man.

Harmon met the eyes squarely. “I was under the impression you did not have mindreading powers.”

“Such powers are not needed in this case. I saw

what you were about to do. Are you so tired of life that you would so easily give it up?"

"Perhaps I am . . . tired."

The vampire's face contorted into a snarl of disdain.

"You are contemptible, Harmon. You hold disgust for me because of my *creative* act tonight. Yet your mind took no small measure of satisfaction upon seeing this act just now—this act of destruction. You call yourself a superior mind, but you really are a small man, one who is no better than any other man. And you have, in addition, the egotistical audacity to think you can stop one of *my* superiority!"

"I can stop you, Count." Harmon said dully. "I can stop you by dying."

Dracula laughed. "Suicide, Professor? I don't think so—not you. Not with your inflated sense of your own worth."

"You are saying nothing I have not rehearsed in my own mind, Count. But you are a horror, one which I have unleashed. I accept the responsibility for that, but I shall not allow the creation of additional horrors."

"*You* will not *allow*! Just how do you expect to stop me? You won't kill yourself, Professor—and you won't hesitate to use me as your weapon of destruction when you feel you have cause. Control? Yes, you can control some of my actions, but who is to know when I choose to turn one of my victims into one of my own?"

The vampire laughed again. "This Garth—even

now, the juices could be flowing throughout his system which will bring life to what is dead!"

"Garth—"

"No, Professor. I am more selective than that. I merely wanted to make the point that you have no control over my acts of will."

Harmon's eyes narrowed. "No control over the acts, perhaps. But I can control the clean-up process."

The Count's voice was wary. "The what?"

"Where, just where," Harmon said slowly, "do you suppose my assistant is right at this moment? And who do you suppose is with him?"

"They—she *called* me, insisted you were in danger and that I— They wouldn't—*dare!*" He moved to the doorway.

"No, Count. You remain here. Their work will not be prevented."

The vampire turned abruptly, a cry of rage on his lips as he lunged toward Harmon.

The professor's eyes closed for only an instant.

The vampire crashed to the floor, the tiny sliver of wood once more imbedded in his heart.

Harmon sat back in his chair and closed his eyes again. He was weary, exhausted. "Yes, Count," he whispered, "we shall have to discuss it some time again. This entire matter of control."

They passed no one on the dark street. The car had been left in the same place as before, on the street end opposite the three shacks which were no more than charred rubble. It had obviously

been a self-contained blaze, not spreading to any of the other shacks along the street.

"Where?" Cam asked. It was the first word he had spoken since they had left Jenny at the main house on Garth's grounds. Then he had argued with the woman:

"The professor—" he had said.

"He does not need us."

"But we at least ought to tell him where—"

"He will know Jenny is safe. He will also know what we have gone to do."

"How? You can't send him a mental message."

She had disagreed. "Not the clear kind of message I can send others, no. But I can communicate a general impression to him, and will do so—when his mind is clear to receive it. Please, Mr. Sanchez, this is urgent. We must leave this island in the morning. We must do what we have to tonight."

"Why *we*? Why do you need me at all?"

She had looked at him with an expression he could not interpret.

"I—I cannot do what is required."

"And yet you want it done? Why?"

"It must be done," was all she would say. But during the drive which followed, Cam wondered about her motives, fully aware that his thinking was open to her if she wanted it to be. The Count had mentioned jealousy in that underground room. Was that it? Or was it something else—something more *human*? Did she have the same revulsion from the vampire—*any* vampire, including her own Master—that he felt? It seemed very

important for Cam to know. But, somehow, he knew that he would not know. One thing was certain. He had often thought of the woman's actions as being the result of nothing more than whim. This time, from the smoldering behind those green eyes, he knew she was deadly serious about what they were going to do.

"There," she said, turning toward a shack across the street from the smoking ruins. "That one. Wait."

It was not to the place she had indicated that she walked, but to the house which had been the scene of the night's earlier events. Cam stood in the center of the black, lightless street, watching as she stepped among the still glowing remains. She reached down to the ground and picked up something.

It was hot to the touch as he took it from her.

She said simply, "It is ready for use—and it carries the correct aura."

It looked like part of the cross which Cam had destroyed. In fact, the sharp jagged edge looked very similar to the weapon he had used with some effect. But that had been underground; how could the same piece of wood have reached the top of—

"Quickly," Ktara urged.

The door to the shack was not locked. The darkness inside was deeper than that outside. Cam had noticed as they approached the structure that its windows were solidly boarded up. Suddenly, as he stepped inside a dull green glow met his eyes. He did not look behind him. He knew the light's source. He did stop, however.

The box was a hastily prepared affair. It rested in the middle of the room. For a moment Cam wondered what they would do if she was not inside, under that flat lid.

"She is there," Ktara whispered. "She dined extremely well tonight."

A cold shiver ran down Cam's back as he crouched beside the makeshift coffin. He crossed himself, then he lifted the lid. It was just resting on top. There were no hinges.

She was beautiful. Her face and nude body a perfect composition of primitive poise and animal grace. Even the teeth which extended over the lower lip did not look out of place, nor did they look over-large. They looked somehow *right*—absolutely correct for this creature, this—

Vampire.

Already there was soil in the coffin bottom. Soil from her native land which, if left intact, could keep her alive for eons to come. She lay in complete composure, the slight smile on her face suggesting a pleasant dream or, more probably, the comfort which comes from having just consumed a pleasant meal.

Again the shiver touched Cam's spine.

"Please . . . hurry."

He nodded, grasping the stake with two hands and remembering that other stake he had held—so long ago, it seemed. Like this time, it was in a country other than his own. Unlike this time, he was then pulling the stake *out* of a vampire heart. This time . . .

He had vowed to kill this woman, he suddenly

recalled. It seemed so long ago but it had been this very day. *My hands on your throat. . . .* But it wouldn't be her throat. As for his hands . . . They tightened around the stake.

"Are there words?" he asked. "Any special words we have to say?"

"They have been said already," Ktara replied. "Please . . ."

His teeth clenched together as he placed his right knee on the wooden floor. Inhaling deeply, he brought both hands high above his head, the jagged and already bloodstained end of the beam even with his eyes. The muscles in his arms and shoulders knotted. Then, with a rush of air through his mouth, he brought his hands down.

There was the soft sucking sound of flesh being pierced.

There was the crunching cracking sound of ribs snapping.

There was the geyser of warm blood shooting high, drenching Cam's fists.

There was an ungodly shriek—as the thing which had been called Euleila struggled to sit up but couldn't because the stake had gone completely through her and now pinned her to the coffin bottom and floor itself.

Then there were the eyes—two black-red eyes which focused upon Cam's own. Eyes which held rage, then hate, then the terror of realization. Then nothing, as the head which held them fell into the awaiting soil.

He turned to the woman behind him.

"Ktara!"

"It is . . . all right. I . . . am all right."

But she didn't look it. She too was kneeling on the floor, but she was doubled over—as if it had been *her* body which had taken the deadly stake!

She lifted her face. In the pale green light which was now weak to the point of extinction, Cam could see her features. They were contorted in pain.

"Ktara—"

"I'll be . . ."

He lifted her to her feet, supporting her against his own body. Her voice was no more than a whisper.

"Her blood . . . was *his* blood, too. I will be all right soon. This is just . . . temporary. A price."

"Price?" he asked.

She nodded slowly. "There always is a price, Mr. Sanchez—always."

He looked back at the makeshift coffin.

"Is there—anything else? Or does that finish it?"

Her pale green eyes looked up into his. "There is nothing more. In your words, Mr. Sanchez, that finishes it—*for this time*."

Her laugh was weak, but there was another quality about it. A strange, hollow, disturbing quality.

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There were no pupils in their all-white eyes

The eyes of the evil demons who abducted Jenny Harmon. She was staying in Jamaica for a semester to study voodoo and perhaps she had pried too far into the hostile people and their dark habits.

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She is naked, her arms shackled to the wall. Daddy Bones pinches the thigh of the white doll he carries. Jenny moans in agony. "And that just a little pinch, missy," he smiles. "You just wait till the real pain come."

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